# the living legend

rev. antonio c. agpaoa

philippine spiritual
church of science
and revelation, inc.

# The LIVING LEGEND

Published By:

**Philippine Spiritual Church of Science and Revelation, Inc.**

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore, I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."

(II Ti, 1:5-6)

No portion of this book maybe reproduced by mimeograph process or any other process without the written permission from the publisher.

# FOREWORD

An American, a certain Mrs. J. MacFarlane, once wrote of a man who had been, and still is being, sought after by many people suffering from various ailments long since pronounced as hopeless cases by those who claim to posses scientific knowledge of healing:

It never ceases to amaze us that now, when the world needs miracles so badly, we who are supposed to be educated and sophisticated cannot accept the fact that possibly there are miracles happening around us still.

"What possible harm can come to the rest of us if a group of people choose to believe in God so fully that their faith will carry them thousands of miles to seek a man who claims to use God's power to heal?

"Oh, but our physicians scoff at him. Well, if we stop to consider it, me thinks our physicians scoff at almost everything that lacks AMA approval."

"The Living Legend" is the story of that man... the story of Tony Agpaoa whose faith healing power has since become legendary. It is written as faithfully close as possible as the same was related to the authors by Tony Agpaoa himself in his native Ilocano dialect and is addressed to those who believed in the following command, with the hope that they may, one way or another, profit thereby:

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16.)

BAGUIO CITY, PHILIPPINES, December 25, 1971.

**THE AUTHORS**

Tropicana

There he was, chubby little Tony, high in the "caimito" opening his eyes towards the blinking sunrise. On many an early morning he had looked into the sun from this precarious perch. He did not know how many mornings for he was too young to count them.

Finding himself up the "caimito" tree was always a surprise. He never knew then, or down the bright years that followed the first not-knowing, how he got up the tree in the night when should have been sleeping on his bamboo ::papag" in his own little corner of their nipa hut.

At five years of age, he was not much given to speculation. He only knew he was scared as he became aware each morning inspite of the Protector-Comforter.

From nipa hut, to the "caimito" tree, to morning waking in the morning sunlight. How? He did not know.

None of Tony's family knew either. But they talked of it so much to others, and the mystery spread like an uncontrollable cogoon fire. Before long, he became famous throughout the countryside while still too young to understand the meaning of fame, or the equivalent of the word in his native Ilocano dialect.

Nobody, all during the early years of the legend, ever saw Tony rise from his bamboo bed and sleep-walked. Nobody had ever seen anyone take him from his bed and place him up the tree. No friend or member of the family was tall enough to lift him up to where the sunrise found him each morning. He never climbed up the tree by night on his own volition. He shunned it by day, though sometime he paused under it as if listening, to hear the voice of the Protector-Comforter.

Family and friends watched the sleeping Tony throughout the night on many occassions but never came to know the secret of his mysterious transfer from his bamboo "papag", to the "caimito", to morning waking.

He was there in bed sleeping, an innocent child oblivious of the deep mysteries of the night. In the midst of the watchers certainty of unravelling the secret he would simply vanish.

Time was a strange thing in the "caimito" tree. Tony would settle back in bed. On the instant, however early he sought sleep—

even before sundown—he would come to himself in the tree top with sunrise in his eyes.

There had been no time. In his sleep, time was lost. But everybody else thought maybe it wasn't sleep. Sleep-walking maybe? No, not that either.

It had been suggested that a tall man dressed in white flowing robe came for Tony in the night. But this was just one of those dream-state ideas of neighborhood mediums who always sought the participation of some spirits in commonplace human activities.

Tony's tree climbing—whether he climbed or not, or however he travelled from their nipa hut to the "caimito"—was a deepening mystery so that in his tender years while still too young to search for the truth of it all, he became a Living Legend.

The Comforter became The Protector beyond the capacity of ordinary human intellect to understand. Both, or the two who may have been one, kept their counsel. Tony kept his counsel, too because he didn't know. Nobody else knew, but every loved to talk and the legend grew.

Neighbors, as the story grew—afraid though they were of the mystery—formed human walls of themselves around the tree and around the nipa hut, determined to unravel for themselves the mystery of the young boy. Whether or not they slept, or some of them, Tony was up the tree again the following morning to the chagrin of everyone who stood sentinels in the night. Tony was the least knowing of all. He cried his frustration in private but did not talked. To the barrio folks, his was a mark of fear—fear of the unknown.

Fear became resignation in one so young while the mystery of his secret transfer continued.

The mystery went on for two years. Perhaps four or five, who knows, since legends are timeless, as timeless as the "caimito" tree which, after the birth of the legend that first night, remain growing beside the nipa shack, a mute reminder of what certainly was Tony's "difference".

A part of that "difference" was the morning formed for Tony's face. One morning he would look like a deva, or a small tree spirit. On another, like an elf or a kobald, depending on the angle

the leave and twigs of the "caimito" tree formed his face. One morning, he seemed to be wearing achaplet, and still on the next, he seemed to be sporting an oval green beard.

There never was any comedy in the way his family or neighbors saw him — whether from different angles or on different mornings.

Tony himself was never, away or up the tree or under it quite serious. He seemed to be hiding his true emotions with his smiles as bright as the sunbeams that greeted his morning awakenings. He seemed to have learned humor from his experience up in the "caimito" tree. Young as he was, he must have learned early enough to reconcile humor with, possibly, a suggestion of tragedy. He never know then, nor did any of the members of his family knew, that "whom the gods would destroy they first make mad".

But he must have sensed somehow, at age five, or four, or three, that man's first churches had been the giant trees of the primeval forests. The dense jungles of the Caraballo mountains that straddles the Island of Luzon from west to east were his many "homes", in that he always felt at "home", anywhere in them except only the "caimito" tree, a child tree among giants, from where emerged the mystery of himself at so young an age.

Who was The Comforter who became the Protector? He, or it, was somebody or something that not even the famed "herbolarious" in many a barrios knew. If he, or it, had a name, it was as many as there were "herbolarios" or spirit mediums, since no two of them had the same name by which to call him, or it—or even her. Not likely "her" though for no man as different as Tony would have anybody but an erstwhile man as his Protector-Comforter.

When The Comforter, or The Protector manifested himself, or itself, perhaps, three, have passed since Tony first opened his eyes to the blinking sun that first morning up in the tree near his natal home, the nipa hut, destined even then to become a shrine — a shrine to The Comforter, or The Protertor. But everytime the people saw the shrine, they knew not of The Comforter, or The Protector. They saw only in the shrine young

Tony in any of his changing elfin faces among the "caimito" leaves.

"Somebody must be looking after you, else you would fall", they all told him. But then Tony knew no one. Nor did anybody knew someone. That her, or it, was someone or something nobody could see was the simplest, yet equally inexplicable, solution to young Tony's emerging legend. This was the easiest to accept among the simple peasants. The spirit mediums, on the other hand, claimed to have seen a tall man in white, though Tony, so very early, felt no kinship with any tall man.

The name Protector, or The Comforter, suited whoever or whatever it was, for how could remain aloft so—and without falling? Other children, including people no longer children, climbed up and tried sitting on the tender twigs of the "caimito" tree, only to find the sitting definitely precarious. A sound sleeper would certainly fall.

Tony, saying nothing to others because others didn't believe, or sought to guide, or told him what to expect, began to seek. The Protector-Comforter, a name that pleased him most.

But what form should he seek? A human form? Or that of of an animal?

Tony began to listen. What, so many times up in the tree top, had he heard which he did not remember? On rare nights when he did not leave the comfort of his bamboo "papag", he dreamed and remembered. But in his night-eerie, he never dreamed and remembered. Yet each morning waking up in the tree had a nagging something to it—something that seemed to keep him egging to remember. Would he be free of the tree if he could remember? Could the unseen and shapeless Comforter, or Protector-Comforter, tell him?

Tony began listening to the birds. In his quest for the answer, he began to listen more carefully. One took for granted that birds of different feathers sang different tunes. Even birds of the same specie, if one listened more closely, sang different tunes from one another. What are they singing of? Tony began to ask himself. Soon he knew when birds were angry, or fearful, or gloriously singing free. Reading the faces of men and women while listening to the voices, Tony knew when people are angry,

or happy, or sad. Therein he found the kinship between people, and between people and birds. It wasn't very clear at first, but he began to understand better when he considered the tones while he watched the birds in flight or merely chirping in their favorite trees.

There were starry-eyed people who believed they understood the language of the birds—that they were more cruel than people sometimes, that their anger could be fearful, and their vengeance as fatal as any conceived by man. But Tony could find no such unrestrained anger or vengeance from the differing tones of the birds. But he made one important discovery. He had seen flocks of birds destroy one of their own which, apparently, is very sick. Tony understood this to be the ultimate in healing. Among men, the most dedicated of healers never go that far even to a patient doomed to suffer long and die.

He kept searching for knowing. Every tree has its own voice —a kind of breathing from which one could hear beauty and wonder. The voices of trees, as among the birds, varies. Trees of the same species differed in their breathing even as people differed. Trees of different species are individuals, even as people.

The birds, he felt, were trying to tell him something. Or convey to him a message? He needed but to understand.

The trees talked and Tony listened. What did they say? Certainly, God's sounds have something in them for man to learn and grow by. Trees and birds under great stress like storms, the rains, lightnings and thunders, cooperated. Trees took the winged birds under the protective canopy of their thick foliage. And the birds knew which trees were safest during the most frightful storms.

Trees, plants, flowers, vines. Tony's people, born among the trees down the centuries, could not die in the thick of them of thirst or starvation. Trees bore fruits and nuts, were festooned with vines which provides pure water to those who know how to procure it. Poison water, too, for those who did not belong well enough to know.

Tony gathered flowers and from them sought to find answers in their fragrance and, in so doing, felt deep down within him, subtle impressions verging into words that, for a long time, would

not fully shape themselves. When he did, he knew that the real awareness of whatever it was somewhere behind the words, is reverently unspeakable.

For many days on end, from the first night of unknowing up in the "caimito" down the years following, he wandered about in Nature's library, learning to read the countless books therein, careful to overlook nothing. He put his ears to the ground where the tiny ants expertly maneuvered their busy armies and heard their marching feet. He kept his counsel here as, often, he went to the ants for his lesson in Nature. Nobody else went to the ants for his lesson in Nature. Nobody else went to the ants for any reason except to keep them out of their food.

Snakes, lizards, all crawling creatures, had information for young Tony. But to talk of what he learned was to cause people to look at him as if he were somehow like the growing, breathing, singing creatures he sought and followed about in their habitats.

Rivers, hills, creeks, ponds, lakes, and whatever that lived in and under their waters, had words of their own to young Tony. He heard the words long before they translated themselves in his expanding consciousness.

All of them together, somehow, expressed the Protector-Comforter.

The ground, wherever his bare feet touched, told him something. Ground and water, when he knew for certain where their safeties were, talked to his body when he cast off his poor garments so his skin could kiss the sun and have the kiss returned many folds.

To know what others knew, or felt they knew, about the land, the woods, the fields and all things in them, he learned to read, finding new wonders seldom found in papers or pamphlets. Among the peasants of Central Luzon books were rarely seen, almost never owned. To Tony, books represented people in the same manner that the woods, fields, rivers, hills represented the vast living complexes and population of the wild. Printed words, as words, were far beyond the knowledge of the tireless boy, but their innate meaning seemed, somehow, to be part of his growing wisdom.

The Protector-Comforter became the spirit of a grain of sand, the soaring tone in any sound in the wilderness, nameless, tireless, timeless, shapeless. An infinitesimal light in deep darkness, a giant holding mountains, forests and rivers in his hands.

Tony felt himself more and more as one with Everything, knowing that he needed only to knock timidly at what he called. The Biggest Door, beyond which everything else could be found.

Rosales, Pangasinan, to give Tony's home place a name, was surrounded, as if by peakless mountains, by The Biggest Door. Not many of his people sought to venture beyond it, fearing the unknown. It was the door that he sought to knock on and penetrate if he wished to look upon what infinite mystery lies beyond.

Tony looked under many leaves for signs of the Protector-Comforter. He strained his eyes in the direction of far distant valleys, sought with penetrating eyes to pierce the jungles to see The Face, as his own face had so often been seen from many angles by family and friends who never ceased to wonder just what young Tony might be. He sought The Face and The Form upon the waters, afoot or in rafts of many bamboos. Someone, he had heard, had walked on the water in His time. Dared Tony aspire to do this, or just try to understand whatever the tale might signify?

He hunted.

People watched him.

People talked.

Tony kept his counsel until, he told himself, if people asked him all the questions about him and he was ready to give the answers.

Tony, walking the roads dim and dusty or soft with rain, often met people he knew. People he met and did not know, seemed familiar, so that he knew he would never actually meet a stranger. Not anybody or anything that ever lived could be a total stranger to him. The different fragrance of seemingly new flowers was, somehow, instantly "remembered".

The bees, the bumbler being the most vocal and authoritative, he could hold conversation with endlessly—so long as no other

human being was near. If someone approached, the bees glided away with admonition: "Don't say anything. There will be more secrets the next time we meet".

Everybody had Somebody—Somebody that one could see and could not really hear except somewhere inside the heart, the head, or in all the little bits that make up the human body. Tony had to have Somebody, too. But all the Somebodies his spirituals said were with him, could not be just one. Tony felt that just one would serve best. There should be a kind of sameness in him. He should not be one who could be different everytime he sees or hears him.

When Tony met his Somebody he knew him instantly, but could not name him, just as he knew many people instantly yet could not recall their names.

Where had he met the Protector-Comforter? In his dreams? In the trees? Flowers? Lakes? Streams? Had he heard him in the chirpings of the birds? In the monotones of the bees? Or had all these told him somehow? Everybody had, everything had, it seemed.

The Protector-Comforter was substantial enough. He was Malayan in color and facial features. He was of average height. He wore a white cloth circleabout his head. Tony sometimes wore such a wrap-around when the days were warm and punget sweats flowed down to his eyes just when there was so much to see that even to blink might be to miss so much.

The one dressed differently from Tony, not surprising when one realizes that he had to make every wearing thing last longer than it could possibly be expected to last.

"You are almost ready, Antonio", said this One. "So I asked you to meet me here."

"You asked me? I heard no one asking."

"You heard, else you would not have come here."

"But I just came, as I go anywhere of my own volition. I always listen. But if I heard there was really no sound."

"There are sounds beyond the ears of mortals," said the One —The Protector-Comforter.

"Are you a mortal, sir?"

'On earth, Antonio, yes—even as you are."

"You are on earth even as I?" asked Tony.

"Not quite the same, Antonio. You are as I was. I am as you will one day be."

There was very little sense in it, but Tony sensed it to be true.

"And why did you send for me, however it was done?"

"It's time for you to know, Antonio, that you are to heal others of their afflictions. You will open wounds and bind up wounds. But you are to search your soul to find the ways of healing. You are to depart from your people during the search. You will hearken only to what you will hear inside you."

"And you will be there?"

"Inside you, no. Around you, yes."

"I do not mind being away from my people for a time. I have been away overnight and quite often at that."

"But not only for many nights, Antonio. Weeks perhaps, possibly months and even years."

The very words of The One made tears start. Tears of sympathy were close to Tony's lids any time, but never tears for anything else. This was the first time. Now he felt his tears streaming down. He knew that he had to follow the suggestion. Where it may lead him, he did not know. But he was determined.

"I will go," said Tony. "I will tell my people.

"They have been told. You have already left. When you return you will be as old as the ages, wise in the ways of Nature, mindful of every living thing as every living thing should be mindful of itself but is not. The need for healers is great."

"How do I begin, Sir? I am eager but I don't know where to start."

The Protector-Comforter pointed and Tony saw the fluttering bird, wondering how he had missed it or not heard is fluttering.

"Take it in your hands, Antonio," said The Somebody. "It does not fear you—or me."

"Tony stepped from the path, taking the bird from the tangled twigs of thorny bush. The delicate thing rested in his hand. Then Tony placed his other hand over it for a moment. He had many birds in his hands before. But never had it occured to him to breath upon any living thing that he held in his hands. But he breathed on the bird through his fingers and opened his hands. The bird looked up as if to ask permission, or to murmur a thank-you. Then it flexed its wings, stood for a moment and flew, circled around Tony's head, as if to leave an assurance that his broken wing was completely healed.

Tony looked about him, pleased and happy, filled with questions to ask The Someone. But The Somebody was nowhere to be seen. Tony studied the dust along the trail. No fresh footprints save his own were there. Had he actually heard and seen his Protector-Comforter? Had he only hoped that he had, and therefore believe that he had actually talked with and saw him?

It was too profound an experience for it to have been a waking dream. But the experience seemed dreamlike as he stood for several moments, trying to recollect his thoughts. He did not call his name. He did not know it—he forgot to ask. He searched every fiber of his memory he sought to recall as one remembers. Nothing remained vivid-except the bird. That was too real. It was not something conjured by the mind, upon some wish or the other.

Had he met his Protector-Comforter? Did he wear shoes? Sandals, perhaps? And some kind of a special dress? Besides his wrap-around, Tony wasn't so sure anymore. His skin was brown like his own, walked the trail like an ordinary mortal . . . the voice akin to his . . . but no, none of these, or anything described The Somebody. Protector-Comforter, yes, if one thought so, but who was he? Or what was he?

Tony turned back home. A force he could not see, pressed against his chest, held him motionless. He could not go any further—not towards his home. He felt a touch of fear. He pushed against the unseen hand. A bird, perhaps the same bird he held in his hands moments before, circled his head, singing then flew

away towards the deep woods. Tony felt the urge to follow. And he followed.

Later he knelt to drink from a still mountain pond. For a split moment, seeing his reflection, he thought he saw his Protector-Comforter look up at him from the pool.

To discover the workings of the minds is beyond mortals. To understand the mind takes eternity. So is the mind of the son of what others called a peasant family, by those who by the same tokens were themselves peasants, hard to understand. Even Tony, himself, did not quite know why his mind thirst so incessantly to understand.

His people worked from dawn and before, to darkness and after, to produce their barest necessities for food. Where they acquired garments, if and when they wore them, he scarcely knew. He wore his when he must—that is when the tropical weather made wearing them a comfort. He slept in them when the nights are cool. He slept naked when the nights are intolerably hot. It is in the nature and mores of his people that bodies be in their natural states. Despite this, there was modesty which saw only the good and clean in the human body.

Where the good and clean were missing, or marred by the unclean, there had to be some hidden influence, something unseen —the unknown. Yet, there were those who could see the unseen, or hear the inaudible. They disagreed no more among themselves than people did about the seen and heard.

Somewhere in the twilight zone between the know and the unknown Tony searched for the answers.

Much of what he learned, he learned by close observation and by the use of his mouth. He watched the birds eat berries, and lived. He, too, ate the same berries and lived. But he went further than the birds. Why were these berries sweet and edible, when others were not? He had no wish to die in agony, if death lurks in the bright berries, for the Promise was in him which would not die, save if he departed from what had been told him to follow. Could one eat on obviously bird-ignored berry and live? Could one, in the least, dare touch it with the tip of his tongue?

Tony is of a church-going family. The tenets of religion were part of his heart before he could even read the bible of Nature—before he could even read any word at all. That God-protected people could eat anything—could take up serpents and survived their bites, or even not provoke their bites—he believed. But despite this belief, there was always hesitation.

"You lacked faith", The Protector-Comforter, somehow, told him. "Have faith in the God of your own depth. Eat, Antonio and learn."

So he tasted of the berry and did not die. He ate of it and knew from the pains in his stomach that faith would be a comfort. But he insisted on living, and when he knew that he was alive, he ate of the same berries in order to learn more. If he did not know the berries name by any of the local dialects he spoke and understood, he gave it a name of his own.

Like the birds he watched every day, nothing that they held to their own sharply defined territories, he imagined a territory of his own—the first of the many he would claim. He would stake a vast expanse, go on further and claimed more territories, all within his mind. In every territory he staked, he was determined to searched for and know of the face of Nature and feel the presence of God. For one knew from birth that God is everywhere.

Though he wept often in his loneliness, he remained true to his search. He search every nook in his first domain in the mountains for other trees which bore the berries he had dared taste, then eat. Did they vary from one another? How many of the same specie of berry were there in his first domain? How did these berries came to be where they were? If, as it seemed simple enough, birds brought them in their bodies, there must become plan of balance that even birds sensed they must follow.

He knew from ancient lores of his race that birds have territories. When traveling to and from these territories, they followed fixed flyways. Tony watched them in their flights, wondered how they remembered and by what means do they mark their ways. Man found trails in the footprints of others ahead of them, increasing the trail by their own. Did birds make trails in the sky? How?

When, as was inevitable, Tony went into burning fevers before he could guess that mosquitoes caused sickness in people by their bites—that mosquitoes had planted their "berries" in his blood streams, even as birds dropped their "berries" in the ground where they eventually grow, he most certainly could see the flyways of the birds different flyways for different species of birds as the birds themselves must see these flyways. These were shining skeins of silvery threads to a fevered vision, forming tunnels along or within which the birds flew faithfully.

In the birds, the flyways, the berries, there were lessons contained in what Tony came to regard secretly in his mind as the Book of Antonio.

How many sweet berry bushes were there in his first domain? How many bitter berry bushes? How many were safe? How many were dangerous? Could man manage the sweet and the sour? And balance them in himself? Tony knew early in his life that he warred with himself—in himself, and outside with his fellowmen. Then he, too, learned that he warred with Nature around him.

Nature balanced itself in the hands of God.

If man did balance Nature in his own hands, how would he fare?

Wild creatures fared splendidly and beautifully in the wilderness since they lived in the hands of God, though they did not know it. The first man and woman knew this but they stepped off the hands of God to follow their whims. Man became scarred and unclean ever since.

How could man disobey the laws of nature and even live at all?

"Man has a will of his own, and God gave him the complete use of it," the Protector-Comforter seemed to say.

What is the difference between green leaves on the trees and the brown leaves on the ground? Are the green leaves living? And the golden brown ones in that strange non-existing men call "dead"? Or is that "non-existence"? In time Tony saw the earth embrace the brown leaves, turning them into topoil in which the parent tree lived to grow and bring forth more green leaves.

flowers, fruits, that, in time die and fall to the ground only to become soil once again.

A great lesson—a lesson with rays of the light of wisdom in it—for man to live by. But who knew of this great lesson or the light of wisdom in it that the world might profit thereby?

"I am the light of the world", said a voice inside him. Tony never thought of himself as a light in the world. Somebody else had said that. Did That Someone suggest that Tony say that of himself? He could be his own light. But how about the others? Could he light the darkness in others—help them uncover their own uncleaness that they be cleansed—starting, perhaps, with his own people? They were the only ones he knew when he was very small in the shadows of peakless mountains seeking answers to unasked questions—questions and answers which were never written in anything that Tony knew of, or could have read had he known.

Tony stayed in his first domain until he knew all that lived in it. He listened to whispers underground as the birds did, with heads cocked, hearing strained. He held his face against the ground —first one ear then the other. And he prayed: "Dear God, let me have ears to hear and a mind to understand."

Why didn't trees, plants, flowers, stand straight as people did, or were supposed to? There was just as much difference between two people as between trees of the same or different families. But man has but one head, two arm and two legs. He had been sometimes called "the walking tree." He has also been variably called "the bird without feathers."

Why did trees have roots, bolls, branches, fruits leaves and twigs? Was there different "blood" in each specie of tree, flower, plant, bush vine?

Tony began seeking answers to such questions which, strangely enough, given up men would not seek to know. First, man live by eating. Tony had nothing of his own, in the first domain of those who came after, so like all the other living things, he must live off that which lived. Few creatures with which he felt true kinship, lived off dead things. But what of the "dead" leaves which made the soil in which the living things grow?

Were these leaves really dead? Was anything really dead?

Innocent Tony knew fire—that fire burned and melted things. To hold a twig over a fire was to cause its "blood" to sweat forth. To taste the sap before firing it, and to taste it afterwards, were to taste two different saps from the same twigs, branch or tuft of leaves.

Tony tasted, boiled, roasted, and kept memory of all things, in his head. He was most unscientific. But he had, at that time, no inkling of science, though what he had been doing he might well have called the science of seeking the secrets of God for the sake of man.

It was almost too simple to get accustomed to being away from home.

Every place else was becoming home to Tony—every place else, that Tony was learning. That there were places beyond the hills, the mountains, the seas, Tony believed without actually knowing. Could one feel beyond sight? Or sense that which is beyond reach? Could one believe without actually knowing? It seemed reasonable.

Strangers came into his domain in the woods from somewhere beyond, and quickly were not strangers, but people with the same color of skin as his own, people who spoke in tongues he did not grow up with but could understand. Is this not reason enough that there were places beyond his sight—in far away places beyond his imagination?

Tony could sit anywhere in his domain and sorround himself with the invisible, the unknown. Then fill in the invisible with something akin to his memory: the green leaves of yesterday, golden brown and dead leaves today, or weeks before. He could see them in his mind's eye as if they were actually there.

Sounds died away in the void of space. But whither did sounds go? Could one follow sounds and continue to hear them even after they seemed to have "died" away? In his mind, perhaps in his memory, he knew he could. And he did. Recalling the songs of the bird which had been whole again in the hollow of his palms and through his breath, he heard the song again. It must be somewere, recorded forever in the void of space.

But where?

What was "where"?

Tony could think of where he had been yesterday, or the week or the months before, or even a year, and in his mind-memory be there. Of the day before and be there. Was he actually, or might he not be, here as well as there? If he could, and quickly he believed it to be so, was he not then a spirit who, he had been told, could be in several places, if not everywhere, at the same time? Could not his spirit then be everywhere, whether or not his physical body moved?

He sat often until it become a ritual to establish what he considered a fact, to picture where he was a circular place. He would draw a circle with his bare toe, sit in the middle of it, and see himself enlarging the circle progressively as when one throws a pebble in a placid lake. The tree beside him would enter the circle, then the tree beyond that, and into the circle he imagined the trees approaching, marching towards the center. But the forest was so vast with millions of trees, so he kept enlarging the circle to include more and more in marching trees, the flowers and the crawling things in them. He kept increasing the size of the circle, but never more than he could grasp in his mind the numbers and identities of the living things in his increasingly accurate memory. It was easy for him to make the circle stand on its rim as an invisible wheel, make it expand and become a globe on which he sat. It took in the land and its people, the sky and its flyways, the underground and its borrowers and dark tunnel crawlers. And he knew that he is yet not a prisoner in the circle, but freer because he knew that not even his imagined globe could encircle and hold him.

"It could be the world itself and all living things on it," he sensed rather than heard the Protector-Comforter.

"I? I could encompass the earth? And all that crawls on and borrows underneath it?"

"It is so planned," said the Protector-Comforter. "It is so intended, Antonio. But there is a condition . . ."

"That I work with and for God?"

"That and more. Your heart must be in your work, wherever your work takes you."

"Even to the ends of the earth, Sir?"

"Yes, Antonio, save that the earth has no ends. It is round, round like the mind-globe in which you sit so often to discover what the ball contains."

"The earth is round? Then why the sharp points of the mountains? What of the spires of God's churches? Why the deep places where the shadows are?"

"There are no satisfactory answers, Antonio, to the question 'why?' but seek the answer anyway that you discover a bit of the answer for the thousands who will come to you."

"But why should anyone come seeking me?"

"For the opening of wounds and the closing of wounds."

'And when will that be, Sir? asked Tony.

"When you are ready, Antonio. When you have the earth in your globe, and the people of the earth are in it with you, instead of you sitting alone on your mind-globe."

"Just how big is the earth, Sir?"

"You know the size of a grain of sand, Antonio?"

"Yes, Sir, I know," Tony answered with self-assurance, never having measured a grain of sand.

"And of a note of dust?"

"I have felt it," Tony replied, making a cry face as he remembered the dust of the trail rising from his feet to his mouth, nostrils, eyes. "A mote of dust is small for the big irritation it causes the eyes."

"As the mote of dust is to Rosales, Pangasinan—may to all the lands you shall know before you go back down the mountains and out of the forests—so are all your tomorrow's domain compared with vastness of the universe as far as the eyes can see—while the unknown far beyond the blue of the sky is vaster still . . ."

"And just as filled with crawling thing?"

"Yes, Antonio, and more—infinitely more. You shall know what you are able to see, hear, smell, taste, touch . . ."

"And when will that be?"

"When you can be sure in your own mind that you, yourself, are ready."

"What will be the signs of my readiness?"

"Your heart, body, mind and spirit will be cleared of hatred, fear, impatience, resentment, greed, envy, covetousness, inequity. . ."

"But, alas, I am filled with all those what you call. . ."

Who is not? But, at least in your case, you know."

It was difficult, and became increasingly more so, for Tony to know for sure how his conversation with the Protector-Comforter took place. He wasn't there to be seen, to be heard, but Tony knew he was there. He heard him—without any sound. He knew without having sensed him. Sometimes he heard from within his head, through his forehead, through his chest . . . perhaps through all parts of his physical being at the same time. There was always a kind of stillness after he "talked" with the Protector-Comforter — a feeling he could somehow accept without question.

Tony appeared and disappeared among the barrios, the small clusters of neighboring huts of hill people in his widening domain. He was welcome everywhere he went helping the menfolks in their small patches of grain fields and eat but little of what he helped produce. He managed to procure food as most people have forgotten how—taking it from the trees, melons, berries. There even blind small creatures that were fit for food if one knew where to find them and knew their property destiny as food.

He joined in their work, and play, and religious rites, and, somehow, managed to keep secret that he was really as young as the youngest and yet as old as the oldest of them all when transfixed in his serious study—when as someone said, he slept deeply with his eyes unblinkingly open.

Young men of his own true age still played in the trees whenever there was time of relaxation from work. Sure of foot they were in the mountain fastnesses, but never as serious and as sure as Tony's thinking. They followed wherever Tony led them, sometimes to their dismay—for not knowing.

Pedro Gonzales for one, whose name reminded people that at least one male forebear had come from a place called Spain—somewhere beyond the seas and of which everybody was totally ignorant, even when shown on maps in the simple rural schools, bounced on his limbs as he hit the ground. His meager clothing torn to shreds showing his brown body streaked with blood. His face drained of blood white and twisted in fear before pain seeped into his being to make him forget fear.

There were cries and screams for Pedro's wound . . .

"You will open wounds and close wounds," the Protector-Comforter had said.

Was this the first wound he had caused to open? Was he to blame because Pedro had dared to follow him? Has he caused the wound?

"You will close wounds, Antonio," he remembered the Protector-Comforter again.

Just what did the Protector-Comforter mean. There was a warm sensation pulsating in his hands. He felt it grow to uncomfortable warmth. Slowly, somehow, knowing he was taking a step with his hands—which would never be pulled back—he reached to cover the wounds. The wound in Pedro's groin was deep striking terror in Pedro's parents. But when Tony withdrew his hands, the deep and bloody gash was closed and seem to have healed. There was no scar. There was only blood where the wound had been.

The blood flow stopped with the closing of the wound, and Tony had that look of being neither nor there, nor anywhere—someone apart from all the onlookers. For a moment, there was silence. Even the winds seemed to have stilled their murmurings. With his first wound closing, all the vast circle Tony had built in his mind moved instantly outward, enlarging until the significance of Pedro Gonzales and the closing of his wound was contained in it.

Then all those who saw and heard, and imagined, began scurrying away in every direction to tell the story—to report the "miracle" . . .

"But there was no 'miracle'", Tony insisted. "Others have closed wounds and have not done miracles.

"But not at the age of nine or ten, and with naked hands," the legend-makers insisted. Every place, near or far from Rosales, Pangasinan, heard of the "miracle" and the legend grew.

Tony fled when the legend-makers insisted that his closing of Pedro's wound with his bare hands was a "miracle". But by fleeing, he added fire to the legend and increased the circle of his first domain.

There were others much more fleet-footed than Tony. Soon they caught up with him and took him back, fearful though they were anent the mystery of his fingers.

At the barrio of Pedro Gonzales' parents, many of the neighbors were already waiting. They were sick, they said and would they be touched by the Miracle Worker?

"Even if it were a miracle," said Tony, "more than one is required if one is to called a Miracle Worker.

"Heal us then," they insisted, "and earn the name."

"Not for miracle's make sake, but for your sake," said Tony. "I do not say that I can heal you for only God heals. But I can touch you as I touched Pedro . . . perhaps God healed him through me."

Tony touched each one, after each one had told him what he believed his sickness to be. After touching them all, each one believed he was healed or felt better. And Tony began to believe.

"I have the most dreaded disease of all," said an old and emaciate man. "I am afflicted with leprosy."

Tony saw no signs of it in the man, though he knew the signs. It was not unknown even in Rosales, Pangasinan. He hesitated.

"You are afraid?" asked the "leper" who insisted he was one. "Afraid that you will also have it? Do you really have faith that God heals through you?"

"I have faith," replied Tony, "but you do not have leprosy. You are well. You are not sick."

"You are afraid," the man insisted, "afraid to touch me."

"And prove you tell a false tale?"

"And prove that you healed none, Antonio!" You have made false claims."

"I've claimed nothing," said Tony.

"You have touched Pedro Gonzales. You touched many others, too. Thus you have made claims."

"No, I will touch you only if you insist, though I made no claims and knowing fully well I cannot heal whoever is not sick. And, if I touch you now, I may even harm you."

"I challenge you to touch me, Antonio Agpaoa!"

"Do not accept, Antonio," he seemed to have heard the Protector-Comforter say. "To accept is to agree that you are proud . . . and fearful.

But even as Tony heard his Protector-Comforter, he touched the naked chest of his challenger. The man screamed in pain and terror as much of his brown-skinned chest turned fiery red—seared by Tony's touch.

Tony's family name is Agpaoa. There was a long period of transition that separated Antonio the boy from Agpaoa the man. It had little to do with years. It was what the boy-man did, or about how people felt about what he did. It was the respect people had for him—the awe caused by the growth of the legend. Tony, himself, didn't seemed to know at what precise stage in his life when the ordinary run-of-the-mill man left off and the legend began, or whether truth as ordinary mortals know truth and legend were one. It didn't matter. But what people thought of and felt about him mattered, and this had much to do with his burgeoning a different life.

Why had his touch burned the chest of the man who had challenged him?

"Deep within you," the Protector-Comforter said, "you were angry. Your pride could not endure questioning. You wished, somehow, to punish your tormentor. And you did."

Was the strange burning a sickness? Had Tony produced it from something within him?

What was sickness? What caused it?

Tony went barefoot, even when he had shoes. He carried his shoes, or sandals—both somebody's ill-fitting casts off—in his hands or about his neck. Early he discovered something basic the body did: the sole of his feet became callous. Not all soles did. Children ran wild, heedless of where their feet struck the ground. The skin of their toes broke bleeding when rocks did not soften. Foot, hands, bodies, were pierced by thorns. There were bruises of all kinds. Tony touched the bleeding big toe of a girl-child intending to sympathize. The bleeding stopped. Of course, it might have stopped anyway. But never, thereafter, would that little girl, or any of her relatives, believe hat Tony did not perform a miracle, especially as the pain stopped, too, and new skin suddenly grew in place of the missing, ready to be broken again in some wild running.

Tony became a fixer of little girls' toes. As the fast word traveled, little girls' toes were brought to him. Crying would stopped as the little girls watched the bleeding stop, pain ceased, at once forgetting, they sought other ways by which to catch Tony's attention. The older the girls, the more ways they could find. This is a tendency on the part of the girls which, at first, Tony did not notice but which, as the years passed, he did notice —and never discovered how to prevent. Nor could he always feel away from it all by smiling his way out. He early learned the common sense of precipitate flight, which needed to seem other than flight, for reasons of politeness.

Thorns, splinters, came easily free in Tony's fingers. They came out free in the fingers of anybody who had strong fingers, but there again was the Agpaoa difference: the wounds from which the fingers of Agpaoa plucked the thorns and splinters did not sicken, did not become big sores, but instantly closed, healed. And people with big fingers which have removed splinters and thorns brought their wounded to Tony, and his hands, touching the wounds cause them—as he put it—to heal faster than hey otherwise might.

For an uneducated young man, his mind was active. What were the especial things he did, or were somehow done through him? What of the ills within people which he couldn't reach, or

couldn't come to him? Would he be able to do something for these people? There were many diseases of which he did not know the names—either the short or long ones like appendecities, yaws, leprosy, and many others.

In Tony's thinking, the inner ills were like the burrowing animals. He could respect those "animals" for their burrowing, but they were not the kinds of animals one could love, like those which burrowed elsewhere than into the bodies of people.

"It hurts right here," a half-grown girl said, indicating a spot in her abdomen, the location of which, that first time, caused the brown-skinned face of Tony to blush red—to the amusement of even the half-grown girl. "Touch it. Take it out from me."

Tony touched it and there was waiting. Tony waited to see what would happen, if anything. The girl-child waited. Her parents waited, watching the touching fingers, the blushing face of Tony. Tony could not keep his fingers motionless.

He moved his fingers towards the child's navel. Many eyes followed it. Filipino families shared experiences with one another as much as they could—sometimes in silence, with awe, sometimes vociferously with glee, with excitement, almost with hysteria.

"It moved with your fingers," the girl-child said.

Tony felt something move with his fingers. He didn't know how he had, for he could see no movement other than that caused by his fingers: Possibly the family had noticed the movement for they agreed with the girl.

"Take it out, through the navel," whispered, or however the Protector-Comforter communicated.

Tony moved his forefinger until it hovered over the small deep mystery of the navel—and the small "animal" came forth. It came forth as a marblemight have come forth if held somehow in hiding. The "thing was soft, uncomfortable to look at, and spread across the girl's abdomen. Tony turned away. The girl's mother took over and examined the "thing".

"The pain is gone," said the child-girl.

"You have enticed the devil to come out of her!" said the father of the patient.

Tony didn't believed in what the man said. He didn't really believe in devils, even though a man Jesus who lived in a time long ago was said to have cast them out. But Tony had heard of what Jesus had said about devils: "I never saw the devil in any man save he placed him there himself!"

Certainly the girl-child could not have deliberately placed a devil near her navel, and that Tony simply enticed it to come forth.

There were apertures in the human body, in animal bodies, too, for people brought their farm and house animals to Tony also. He could not say to anyone: "I can heal people but not animals." Nor could he say that he hadn't time to burden himself with animals. Besides, he loved animals sometimes more than he loved people. If they questioned when one could not answer, one need not answer or could simply pretend that one did not hear.

The Tony Agpaoa legend grew. He was the young-old one who herded inner hurts as if they were pigs or sheeps, from any where in the body to the ears, nostrils mouths . . . to the paps . . . to lower orifices. Almost all these inner diseases, Tony soon found out, responded to his touch.

But some were stubborn . . . unpredictable as pigs. Pigs could be herded everywhere but the desired direction, unless there were chutes they were forced to follow. There were hard things, soft things, in the human body which "herded" towards the body orifices even less readily than pigs. There were things which moved not at all, but which scattered, or were one, then became two, three, more over different areas in the body where they seemed to haved jumped when body watched. But the sick ones of all ages knew when this happened. Some people suffered bodily pains that seemed to travel from one place of the body to another . . . and they suffered in silence . . . Some screamed that they may be heard far and wide. Then they would listen as if to catch an echo of their screams and, thereby, know how far they have been heard.

The noisy ones attracted the most attention . . . the most sympathy . . . perhaps the most irritation.

"You, Antonio," said the Protector-Comforter, "should never be noisy."

Tony Agpaoa needed to be noisy, for his friends who became numerous as days and nights passed, made enough "Agpaoa" noise to attract attention much more than Tony would ever need, certainly more than he would ever want. He spoke little while he worked . . . answered few questions. What he did, answered for him.

There were "shapes" in people, dark and gloomy if the faces correctly told, which expanded, some slowly, some quickly, their pain growing worse with their expansion or diminishing with their contraction. Sometimes these causes of illness in people both expanded and contracted, like extra hearts which pained the real hearts. These Tony feet with despair.

There were shapes too big to exit via the normal human orifices, however the latter expanded, and such mass remained where they first appeared. Some of these strange mass in the human body could be herded out, to speak, but not into the open. Soon after Tony withdraws his hands, the mass returned of their own accord, and painfully, to where they first appeared.

People murmured against Tony because, obviously, there were miracles he could not perform. Notwithstanding that

he promised none and made no claims. Enough of such promises and claims were made for him, so that when ailing people came to him for healing, he felt compelled.

"You are not compelled," said the Protector-Comforter.

"You always have a choice."

"Even to refuse to do what is demanded of me, Sir?"

"The Father requires you to do nothing, nor that which you do be done in His Name."

"Rightfully, I work only in His Name," said Tony.

"To say and believe in that is to perform what the old world calls miracles. It is not so. It is the law."

"I am to know the law?"

"You will not only know the law. You will manifest the law. And you will manifest it more if you maintain your feeling of working with God.'

Impressions, not words, came from the Protector-Comforter, but Tony the boy carried them as the words of Agpaoa.

"I seemingly cannot heal you," said Tony on one fateful occasion, fateful in that it changed his life forever and those of thousand others. "Your inside hurts so but the pain does not hear me . . . does not respond to my hands . . ."

"I will follow you until you are able," said the patient—this one a woman old enough to be his grandmother. She had a rapidly growing mass low down in her abdomen. Wherever Tony went, thereafter, in his jungle or mountain travels, sooner or later she would appear—a walking accuser. There were many others similarly afflicted with malignant growths, who also followed—an army of people doomed to suffer and in their suffering became his hordes of silent accusers.

Because they insisted, weeping, wailing, demanding, accusing, Tony changed his mind and examined the woman again.

He laid her on a mat on the bamboo floor of one of the seemingly endless lines of nipa huts, lifted the woman's garments and examined the growing mass in her abdomen

again. The thing was so clearly evident through her brown skin but still it would not heed the pointing finger of the healer who made no claim to healing.

"It won't move towards any opening in your body," Tony exclaimed. "If I could only open your abdomen right where this growth is. If only I were a surgeon and knew enough about operating on human bodies, I would incise right here!"

He grated his teeth in exasperation as he angrily drew away his finger tips along the woman's abdomen.

Terror gripped him as the woman's abdomen opened as if he had actually used a knife along a line he had just indicated. He hadn't even touched the woman's skin with his fingernails. Yet there was the incision. And blood spurted from it.

"Hold the wound open with one hand, Antonio," instructed the Protector-Comforter. "Do you see the shape below?"

"Through the blood, yes."

"Reach in with the other hand, forth the shape with all that wrongfully attaches to it," continued the Invisible Teacher.

Tony pulled out the tumor, whose true name he did not know. His hand dripped with blood—blood that continued to gush forth from the wound.

"Stop the bleeding" said a man. "Stop it or the bleeding will kill her.

"But how?" Tony was in agony. He did not know how, and blood continued streaking down the woman's abdomen.

"You opened it with your fingertips" said the man calmly. Maybe all you have to do now is to wave your hand over the bloody opening and . . ."

"Like this?" asked Tony, moving his palm over the wound without touching it, feeling only that he heeded what the man said because, in his agony, he had no conscious thought of himself save his exasperation, desperation, fear.

All eyes followed the sweep of his hands. There remained only streaks of drying blood on the woman's abdomen. There was no wound . . . no scar.

Tony turned to the man who had spoken to ask him how he had known that a wave of his hand would close the wound. The man wasn't there. He must have slipped away. Tony went out of the hut. The man must have sped away faster than any man could run. Who was the man?

Tony returned to the hut . . . to the smiling woman. "Are you in pain," asked Tony. "I didn't intend to hurt you."

"For the first time for as long as I can remember," the woman said, "I am without pain. The opening didn't hurt. Neither did the closing."

Save for the drying blood, there was no sign of what had happened except that the growth no longer bulged in the woman's abdomen.

"I am grateful to the man who told me what to do when I didn't not know what to do in closing the wound," said Tony. "I want to thank him, but he is gone. How did he got away so quickly?" "Nobody did," the others in the crowd informed him. "What man are you talking about?"

"You must have heard him! He spoke loud enough. As if he knows exactly what I should do. It felt that he knew, so I did exactly as he told me."

They insisted there had been no man who had spoken to him when he made his first strange opening and closing of the woman's abdomen. Tony insisted that there was a man, a peasant like all the others. The people looked at him strangely, then at one another.

"A Protector," said a voice which nobody else, on later investigation, seemed to have heard, "may take whatever appearance he elects."

A tall man in long white flowing robe, long ago . . .

A peasant of peasant height, brown skinned as peasants could be, unremarkable in a group of peasants . . .

Which, if either, was the Protector-Comforter?

"Then," said Tony inside, "you did it, not I."

Neither of us, Antonio," came the inner voice again, but the Palm which is in all palms, because God is everywhere."

There remained all the others who had followed after the old woman—men, women—, children.

"But let there be no blood," murmured Tony as he rolled up what ragged sleeves he had.

"Without blood to show," came the voice, "even those completely healed will not believe. Well, perhaps, not so much blood."

"The sight and smell of it sickens me," said Tony.

"It sickens them, too, but that is also proof that they might believe."

"People," thus Tony began the building of his philosophy, "are very strange."

"To you, Antonio and to one another."

"Even to themselves?" asked Tony. "Even as the tall man in white of long ago and the disappearing peasant are strangers to each other?"

"The inner voice expressed quite clearly an inner chuckle, a sign of humor which Tony did not share.

"I need hot water, said Tony.

"For what?" a chorus of voices asked him.

"To wash my hand after each operation."

Nobody answered, but when the next wound had been closed, and noobdy reminded Tony of the hot water, he moved to the next opening, the closing . . . and the next . . . and the next . . .

When he began to tire, or felt that he should tire, he insisted to himself: "I shall stay rested in body."

One body . . . one opening and closing. That which came from the wounds sometimes trailed tendrils of flesh that were different, as if some kind of roots had clung to the shapeless mass and had been pulled free from the diseased bodies of human sufferers.

Those who had been operated on were busy, smiling, doing chores they had hitherto not done. Some prepared meals for all. Some danced to the music of a barrio rondalla. Some laughed and jumped about in glee. Others headed away for their homes beyond the hills running, Tony supposed, to let their families know.

"How many?" Tony murmured.

"Enough," said the woman whose guest he happened to be—rather in whose nipa hut his patients had cornered and surrounded him. "Enough to people of a small village. Enough, perhaps, as a grandparent's family reunion."

"That could be many," Tony mused, then remembered that these people couldn't even count further than the total number of their fingers on both hands and all their toes on both feet.

"More, even," said the woman, "than the combined fingers and toes of three Agpaoas."

"Then, enough is enough, and I must go," said Tony.

"To where people can't find me again for many days," Tony answered. "I have so much to think about."

"It isn't good for a boy, or even a man, to think too much," said the woman.

"There must be some meaning in what you say," countered Tony. "But what?

"From now on," she said, "you will never, for more than a few necessary minutes, be alone, or have time to think. Words of miracle healing travel fast—as fast as, if not faster than the winds—farther than you can imagine. You can never hide from what these words will produce."

"But if you and others do not know where I am going," Tony began . . .

"Those who seek will find you. Besides, you cannot travel as fast as you wish."

"Cannot travel fast you say?" asked Tony. "I carry nothing. Nothing will slow me down. Those who want to overtake me, or travel ahead of me, will need to travel fast indeed."

"Come, I will show you why you must travel slowly. See for yourself, you are not without weights to carry anymore. You are a man of property."

"Beyond the thickest behind the nipa hut, the woman showed him why he must travel slowly. People had left payments for their healings, for the opening and closing of their ailing bodies, with some extra, perhaps, for the blood he had not stayed. A dozen or more ducks, tethered by their legs, fourteen chickens of as many colors, shades, tints, hues, rhythms—also tethere by their legs a suckling pig with no mother to suckle and squealing plaintively for having been weaned so young, kid-goat, a black puppy dog. Nearby, and still part of the tokens, small sacks of rice. And much, much more smaller bags of long hoarded coins. Bags of fruits, or sweet potatoes, or gabi, which Tony could not identify through the sacks—even had he stoped to ascertain.

"Return them," he shouted to the woman. "Give them back to their owners.

"They will not return this way again, Antonio. Will they?"

"Then keep all these for yourself—and keep secret the direction I will go!"

"I can keep nothing that is not mine," the woman said.

"I give all to you, then!"

Tony started running. Beyond the thicket he looked back. Nobody was watching him, save some of the tethered birds and animals. He cut to the right. Out of sight, he reversed his direction . . . reversed it . . . and again . . . When he was sure nobody could follow him by his footprints, he looked back from the woods.

Downhill, he saw a thicket, beside which were tethered birds and animals. Nearby were sacks of unknown things. He held his breath. His recent hostess appeared and began to feed the birds and animals from the sacks Tony had never opened. Tony duck behind a tree, though sure she had not seen him. But the woman looked towards his direction and waved to him. Even so, she might not have seen him. But he couldn't be sure now.

Hours and many a different trails later, having gone, he was sure, directly away, he looked back. For a few moments, he though it was the same thicket, the same tethered birds

and animals, the same sacks of unknown tokens. But no, the shapes and sizes were all different—and so were the people who sat quietly, unseen at first, solemnly waiting.

God seemed to have always around Tony wherever he was. He didn't have the slightest idea who God was, or what He is supposed to looked like. "God created man in His own image", somebody was supposed to have said in a time long ago. But God is supposed to be responsible for everything except the devil that makes people sick. Somebody said that, too. Or He was responsible for some people's illness because they misbehaved. It was easy to misbehave, Tony found out... easier to be punished for what one did that didn't seem wrong when done. At least that is how it sounded when people came to Tony for healing.

"God has punished me with boils because I haven't fed my children."

"God has punished me with disobedient children because I have been away from home, too, long.

"God has punished me with rashes of the skin because I have been selfish to my fellowmen."

"God demands sacrifices from me more than from other people."

"God caused my children to die because I have been unfaithful."

"God has punished me with 'lupus' because I took His name in vain."

"God has punished me with constant hunger because I haven't fed the poor. How can I? I am poorer than any poor who needed to be fed."

God gave. God took away. God took away more than He gave, but you never dared say that.

"How do I work with God?" Tony asked himself. He asked himself because nobody could tell him. Or because everybody told him differently.

Receive payments for healings done with his bare hands? How could one take money for something that was God-given?

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," the Man Jesus had said. But that had been a long time ago . . . down the years almost beyond memory. How much, or what, had Jesus received for His healings? Who, since He seemingly took nothing, fed Him? Not the ravens, or any other birds. Tony was friendly, even when he was young, of the birds in the foothills of the Caraballo mountains, but they fed him nothing. Indeed, like his patients and others, they asked for food from his hands.

People came from everywhere—from farther and wider "everywhere" as his name became known and associated with strange healing powers, with all conceivable complaints of illness. It was startling what they brought as tokens of gratitude—a bit of everything: an egg, oftentimes hard-boiled to make sure it didn't break enroute, others blackened by roasting. More eggs than Tony could use. But they could not be thrown away. What must be done with those one that could not be eaten?

Often Tony, overloaded in one place, carried his "pay" to other places and held a feast among the needy of his own people. For everybody who was there, or came running—and always there were many people who came running—Tony played host, or asked whoever his host or hostess to make sure that all who came were fed. Sometimes there was plenty. At other times, far from enough for everyone. Tony knew from his early childhood the story of the loaves and the fishes. But he didn't try to multiply his food in the manner Jesus did. He was not Jesus and he was afraid to try.

"What if I find that I can?" he asked his inner voice—his Protector-Comforter. "There would be no end to people demanding of me to multiply their food supply."

"You are doing it now," the Protector-Comforter told him. "You have been solving some food problems by taking food from where it is plentiful to where it isn't . . . from people who have to people who have not."

This business of taking food from one place to another took a strange turn.

"There is plenty here," a woman said. "It is yours to take with you. It is for your own eating. But to us here, it doesn't seem fair that you take it elsewhere for other people to eat, when giving you some leaves less for our own needs."

Tony learned something quite early: It is impossible to please everybody, and more often than not, impossible to please anybody. One way only could he please people—by his strangely gifted hands.

In his healings, he soon discovered there was one thing he must be careful with at all times—not to touch a woman or a girl newly pregnant. His Protector-Comforter warned him of this early enough. "You will cause miscarriage if the pregnancy is under two months along."

Tony, like all his people, was at home with such problems. Little was kept away even from little children—children almost too little to become pregnant. To his people, pregnancy when it happens to an unmarried woman or girl, is a dreadful thing. But some took this matter of granted. There are instances when a boy and a girl are left alone together in some secluded place, the inevitable almost always happen.

"Should I not," Tony asked his Protector-Comforter "touch the bodies of the newly pregnant whose family honor had been ruined and shamed by an unwanted pregnancy, that the dishonor or shame may be removed."

"Their honor against your soul?" asked the Protector-Comforter.

Tony had occasion to blame himself for a miscarriage. With all his inner knowing, he should have known, before he touched the girl. She didn't tell him untill afterward. But it was too late by then. Had he, a good Catholic, sinned against God? Had his unknowing been a "cloak for his sin"? He didn't know and he was fearful . . . for his soul. But the girl delighted, as were his parents.

Was it right to "heal" a pregnancy outside marital union? His Protector-Comforter, certainly, implied it wasn't. Tony, him-

self, didn't think so, or anybody whom anybody Tony knew believe so.

One of the inner games people played, Tony began to play with. After the first one when Tony hadn't thought of such a thing, He knew, the instant he saw "that certain look" on a woman's face. But what if, aside from the unwanted pregnancy, or even a desired pregnancy, something else deeply ails a woman? What if he healed that, the healing caused a miscarriage? Could one perform the one and prevent the other?

"With God all thing are possible," the Protector-Comforter told him. But even this gave Tony little comfort. Even when, in his mind and in his heart, he was doing God's work, he believed he was doing wrong. Well, not clearly or exacty wrong, but uneasy in the face of a possible wrong.

The game started:

"Put your hands on my belly and free me of shame," a girl whispered.

"And burden my soul with a sin?" Tony whispered back.

"God will forgive you, because you do much of His Goodness in the world."

"Of this I am not sure. Have you told your father and mother?"

"They would beat me black and blue. They would even beat me hard enough to do what I am asking you now."

"Then confess to God, and take your beating. It is the only way. What is done is done."

"You suggest that I should be beaten, Antonio?"

"I suggest nothing. I say only that I will not bring about miscarriage if I know it. And I know it now."

"Then why don't you pretend you don't know it?"

"How can I pretend to myself that I do not know, when myself knows that I do?"

"There is yet another way. I doubt if you can help yourself if . . .," the girl hesitated and smiled impishly.

"If what?"

"If you were to continue to refuse, and I would tell everybody that you are responsible for my shame."

"I would most vehemently deny everything."

"A girl accuses . . . the man denies, and kept on denying, but none would believe him. Only the girl would the people believe."

"Then let's go to your parents. You accuse me, and I will deny. Let your parents decide."

"But to my parents, it will be just as shameful if the man is you, as if it were someone else!"

"So?"

"I bear my burden."

Tony took no joy in this situation, which was to arise in some form or another almost every day in his ministry. He did call his work "ministry". This was the word suggested within him by his Protector-Comforter. He was to become one of the youngest minister in his island country, and the youngest faith healer as well.

Because girls and women pursued him for many purposes of their own—including treatment for illness, imagine or otherwise—the legend grew a bit more. He learned to say nothing to accusations, questions, insinuations, for if he gave the slightest excuse, or explanation, many would say: "Antonio Agpaoa said it!"

When he did say something, it was never the same at the receiving end of the third or fourth mouth . . . hopelessly twisted out of context after the fifth—unrecognizable even by the author or starter of the tale. That is how legends oftentimes depart from fact to fiction, traditions grew and expand and traditions no longer, and religions proliferate and then start pontificating to each other. And, at an early age, indeed, Tony became a kind of religion—but never to himself.

He was what people made him to be. He was never, regardless of the reams upon reams of tall tales spun about him in the press of the world, a "self-styled" anything—except being a minister of his own—much later—legally founded and accredited church.

He found himself healing other than physical illness. Mental illness and physical illness have a common basis. Many were those he could heal by words . . . still many others by a sweep of his hands. But more than all, he healed by silent, profound and sincere prayers. His prayers were not necessarily worded, but they were deeply felt. His prayers were right desires, always. So he learned the law concerning desire as Jesus stated it: "That which ye ask of me, believing, I shall give it to you."

Tony heeded another law: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." He started by respecting himself, a basic love beyond which one knew nothing of loving others, never having learned "at home."

By his belief, Tony worked miracles, though he must have known somehow there were no miracles, actually, but merely knowing more in the applications of the law. He started learning the law—not the mundane law, with which he was also soon to become acquainted—but divine law.

He took note of The Flow How did you heal hunger in a home? You considered it even as you considered any other sickness. You might or might not touch it with your hands, but you could always tell the breadwinner of the family where to get a job and encourage him to find it. Often such a one, on a job far away, found other "families", but this could also have been The Flow—The Flow of money. For the family he had left on its own, might become more affluent by no longer depending on the departed one —until, perhaps, he returned, later, discovered the affluence and start to diminish it again.

Show people the picture, the look, of plenty, urge them to find it, and it was desire and The Flow of Things which brought plenty to the house. If the house took hunger for granted, hunger entered in like the camel's head. If the hungry house is also a house of fear, then hunger brought the fear and the house was twice cast down.

Even when he had nothing himself, which was most of the time, Tony found it easier to find for others than for himself. He didn't matter so much to himself.

"But you matter to yourself," insisted his Protector-Comforter, "if you are to matter to others. To consistently heal sickness,

you must remain well. To heal hunger, you must also eat. To heal fear you must be fearless in the face of the seemingly fearful."

Tony walked the hills, the mountains, the valleys, the kaingins, the flatlands, with his hands held out, not to receive, but to give. Even so people still said of him which is quite not true: "He holds his hands out for" rather than "He holds his hands with . . ." And these remarks hurt Tony more that no healing power could assign, more so after he discovered that a laborer is truly worthy of his hire and should demand, or at least accept recompense. Tony, thereafter, refused nothing that was given to him "worthy of his hire." A lemon, though he had bags of the fruit, an orange, though he had more than he could carry, a "caimito," though he "came" out of a "caimito" tree on that first night of unknowing, a pig which he could not led but had to be carried like a baby, or carried squealing around one's neck. When there were more pigs more than people, he accepted. But what he accepted he gave away leaving only enough for his own needs.

"What you thus accept," the Protector-Comforter told him one day, "is returned to the people many times over. It's the law."

"I accepted a pig, and he who gives me he pig receives many pigs?" Tony asked ingredulously. That was the first time he heard the strange law.

He sensed a chuckle from somewhere within him—the mute answer of his Protector-Comforter.

"Perhaps the giver of pigs does not receive many pigs in return, since the pig given was consumed in substance," The Voice finally came, "but one such giver receives healing at your hands. Surely, living without pains is worth more than many pigs."

Something else bothered Tony. How did sin balance with healing? Is it not true that everybody came to earth as the result of sin? Having so entered the world, did not everybody as a consequence, increase his sinful burden? And gleefully more often than not?

But only if the sin were discovered did come, or so it seemed as proved by the girls and women who whispered to Tony, seeking, imploring the touch of his hands in some secret places for secret healing.

There was temptation everywhere—in many different and seemingly wonderful guises. There were even times—for Tony was

human and was becoming more so as the years passed by—when he wasn't thankful for the invisible ever presence of the Protector-Comforter to warn him of the near threat of temptation.

"I see it . . . I hear it coming," the Protector-Comforter would whisper. "And I fear very much for you."

"And what you fear will come upon me?"

"It will, but you will not be taken by surprise since you already know."

"I am always surprise," replied Tony. But there came a time in his life when he was beyond surprise, having learned that anything could happen to anyone—and overmuch to himself.

So much that was very clearly good in the beginning could be bad in the end. And conversely, the bad itself which one shunned or shied away from, could turn out good. One had to close one's eyes and prayed for the best. As ony grew in years—faster than he grew in height—his prayers became deeper, more certain, as he felt their results in his hands, body and soul.

"Go to the pool of Siloam and wash!" In his heart . . . in his mind, Tony went often to that pool which Jesus spoke of 'Jesus' command sounded often like a whisper within him.

"Cleanse your people of dirt and you will have less healing to do!" He wasn't quiet sure who said this. It could have been his Protector—Comforter. Or could it have been that man who live long ago in far away Nazareth? And what does it mean: "Cleanse your people of dirt . . .?" Dirt from the scums of the earth, or does it mean sin?

Tony, almost from his first memory, was interested in fire. Fire, in its many colors, intrigued him. Fire was more than fire. He felt there was something of Vast Innerness to it. Each color and crackle had something to tell the capable-of-understanding. There was the sort of fire, for instance, around which people sat at night, listening to its mysterious speech. For fire does speak. It crackles companionably. It snaps to attract attention. It inspires people to speech some times to telling of all tales. Sometimes, or maybe oftentimes people of all ages when listening around a campfire, or any open fire, would seek to out do each other in narrating tell tales. Such narrations, hearkened to with interested faces, would never be regarded as untrue. How could something beautiful . . . something that interests . . . something that is wonderful woven around something immensely beautiful or so cruelly terrifying, be untrue? How could anything that the mind of man, the seat of wisdom, "made up" be untrue?

"You know what is true . . . and what is not true, Antonio," said the Protector-Comforter. There is something of truth in the greatest untruth. Let your interest be to include more and more of the truth in what you say. For as you grow in age, the more people, especially the humble, ignorant and unlettered, will want to believe in you. Let that which you say that they believe be something that, with the passage of time, can satisfy them."

Tony could not, in conscience, say "I believe that is so." What is truth? If he didn't know it, how could he even toss it to any-

one who may regard it is truth. Surely, it is not enough that, because he says it, it is truth.

So many different colors in a flame. You could look into a fire and lose yourself in it. You could look into a fire and hear the frightened and incoherent murmurings of dawn men at the first burning tree struck by lighting. You could look into a fire, bathe in it, unharmed, in all its colors, in all its shades, to its rhythms and wonder if it could wash you of all your earthly sins and inequities and be forever young.

"The flame tongues spell out words to him!"

"The fire tells him things to tell us . . . or perhaps, just for himself."

"To Tony, the fire shows pictures, as large as the world . . . No, as small as the heart of a grain of sand."

"The fire creates pictures in his eyes."

"The flame paints his face golden as the falling leaves in autumn."

"The fire is cold to him! See . . . he sits with his bare feet almost in the fire . . . yet he has no sense of burning!"

"I've seen him walk over live coals without seeming to feel or care at all."

"Yes, and more. He has fire inside him. It feeds on the fire outside him."

"And you can't see either one, inside or out."

"The two fires blend as one . . . or maybe walk together . . . and Antonio listens to both."

"They talk to each other—the inside flame and the outside flame, and Antonio tells one what the other says."

"No. when he is between them he need not tell what the other means. By way of Antonio, they know."

How many times did it happen, this sort of entering, bathing in the flame, imaginatively, then coming out of it to hear the tag-ends of words and wonder just what one's relationship with the flame is.

Man is made of some sort of flame. The flame of love could set a man going, so to speak, a tiny spark of that mysterious something which could grow to such proportions as to rock or rule the world . . . to Tony, at least the world into which he grew up after he came forth from the House of the Flames. Tony always drew something from the flame just like that. He would think, then add words to his thought until story after story are woven completely within him for the pleasure of people . . . old people and new people who kept adding themselves to the old people.

He looked for the Protector-Comforter in the flames, and, instantly, saw him. He looked for the faces of yesterday's patients, and saw them. He looked for an ancient city in some barren land far across the seas where once the Son of God trod barefooted "cleansing the dirt out of His people," and saw it. He looked for ships of many flags in many foreign ports and saw them with sea gulls circling their masts, in the fire, flying. He looked for the "caimito" tree from whence came the early mysteries of his life, and, because it began instantly to form, saw it as not being —lest it materialize and find himself a boy again sitting on its tender twigs as in his first unknowing, to fright and, possibly, consternation of those who sat with him, watching the pictures his mind drew in the flames.

Yes, they did watch. And they saw, as well. For time after time, some or several of those who sat with Tony was in the flames that which Tony, himself, saw. And out the "see-ers" came, later on, some of the "wonder healers" who would become famous because of their mysterious powers culled from the flames of fire.

Did Tony, in any sense, control the flames?

"He walked through them and they did not burn him, or his clothes, or consume him in substance."

"True," said his Protector-Comforter, "you can do this, but not to entertain or prove to anyone, including yourself, your power over flames. But if there is an urgent need, and the flames stand in the way, open a passage and walk through unburned."

Tony would shape his lips into words in his native Ilocano dialect: "Open your flame that I may see the face of my friend beyond."

And the flame opened.

"Die down all flames . . . all tongues of flame!" but didn't say it aloud for that would be some kind of entertainment. But the flames died down, as if they suddenly withdrew into hiding from something passing over. "Rise again . . . and higher," he shaped the words. And higher the flame rose.

Tony believed that there was some sort of control here, given him, possibly, by the Protector-Comforter whereby he might do the work of and for God. But how? There seemed to be no immediate need for his greatest discovery in the field of imaging. He could create so many images for which there seemed no use at the time.

But there came a time . . . a frivolous time.

Tony and a friend were playing a ball game long played by children of other lands. In America, it was called "anti-I-over." You stood on one side of house that wasn't so high. The other player stood on the opposite side of the house, out of sight, and the first player yelled: "anti-I-over!" at the same time throwing the ball over the house top to the other side for the second player to catch, carefully watching to see if he catches or misses it. Or the first player could throw the ball, he quickly run around the house to see if the second player catches or misses it. If he didn't catch it, he was "it" and must pay some penalty. If he catches the ball, and the first player didn't duck fast enough and hit him with it, the first player was "it". Or if the second player catches the ball, he runs around the house, and if the fellow who threw it was still looking up the slanting roof, mouth wide open, hits him with the ball and he was "it". If any player throws the ball but missed to make it fall over to the other side, he was "it". There were usually as many rules as there were young people to make them.

One day . . .

The player on the other side threw. Tony waited to catch the ball. The ball rolled down the slanting roof on his slanting side down to the gutter, too high for either players to reach it. There was no ladder. There was no pole with the requisite hook with which to retrieve the ball either. There was no tree beside the house which they could climb and work down into the gutter and retrieve the ball.

Two young minds considered . . .

"I could stand on your shoulders, Antonio," said the other.

He did, but their combined height wasn't enough. Antonio stood on the shoulder of his friend, but the two were no taller than the two had been. They were both embarassed they hadn't known it would be that way the other way around. Their predicament led to irritation.

"The only way to get that ball down," the other boy interjected when his irritation had progressed just so far, "is to burn a hole in the gutter. Haven't I heard, Antonio, that you have a miracle way with fire?"

"I can walk through it, so I was told," answered Antonio, "and I tried and did it, too."

"That's not what we need here. Burn a little hole in the gutter, with your eyes, right where you saw the ball roll—just big enough for the ball to roll through."

"That's nonsence! Nobody can do that!"

"But if anybody could, you could," said his playmate loyally.

"Well, we've tried other means."

Antonio fixed his eyes steadily at the spot of the gutter where he knew the ball is hidden . . . and thought: "Burn through . . . just big enough for the ball to roll down through . . . " He though fiercely, setting his mind, his will to the unusual task.

"Burn a slightly bigger ball-size, that ball-size hole and no more, so the ball can roll down. I'll catch it and tag Alfredo and he'll be 'it'.

"Antonio," said Alfredo, the sound of fear in his voice, "the gutter is beginning to smoke."

Tony stopped, studied the spot. Maybe there was some smoke, but he couldn't see it. He concentrated on the thought the more fiercely.

"Burn a hole, I tell you . . . burn a hole!"

He and Alfredo were to be glad, moment or two anyway, that there was nobody home.

There was smoke . . .

Then a concentric circle of fierce ember . . . ever growing without flame. And it grew bigger while Tony triumphantly willed it to grow more . . . and more . . . in size, that the ball might come through the hole faster.

Then the ball fell through, smoking a little, smelling of smoke. Tony failed to catch it. Alfredo did but dropped it . . . it was hot as coal can be hot.

Now they had the ball. But the burning hole became bigger and doesn't seem to stop.

"Blow it out, Alfredo!" shouted Tony to Alfredo.

"You blow it out! You started it," retorted Alfredo.

But how could one blow with all the exhaled air from one's lungs if the flame were too far to reach? It continued to burn even as the consternation of the two boys was nearing panic proportions.

"Make it stop!" yelled Alfredo. "With your thought power just how you started it!"

Tony was so flustered . . . perhaps nervous even, to have any idea how to do it. He and Alfredo began bringing things out from the hut, running frantically in and out, seeking to get all valuable things out before the cogoon roof caved in.

The winds fanned the flames to roaring which became louder as the fire enveloped the whole house. Both boys were terribly frightened.

They got everything out just when the whole of the roof caved under. This was not too important for huts could be rebuilt and neighbors would only be too glad to help. What caused the hut to be burned down was what frightened Tony. Who would ever believe that Tony willed the hut to burn down? Just so a ball fall down from its gutter?

Don't ever tell anyone what did it, Alfredo," Tony nervously admonished his friend. "Promise?"

"Mean it?"

"I do mean it!"

But when the people of the barrio who saw the fire from their fields arrived just when the burning flames collapsed to the ground and angrily demanded from the two what happened, Alfredo gleefully told them of the mystic feat of Antonio, his friend and playmate.

The old peasants looked at Tony with strange glare. Alfredo's father with embers in his eyes looked about, gathering a handful of dried leaves.

"Set them afire with your eyes . . . or your mind . . . or however you do it with your will power," Alfredo's father half-shouted in anger. "If you can do as we were told, we may forgive you for burning our house down. But if you can't, mind you, you will not see the end of my wrath."

Tony, knowing now that he could do what is demanded of him, sealed in something of his immediate fate when he looked steadily at the mound of leaves. Smoke rose . . . then burst into flame . . . soon there was only a pile of smouldering ashes.

Alfredo's father, with a devilish look in his eyes, half-carried Tony to some distance from the crowd.

"To gain forgiveness, Antonio," the old man told him, "you must now burn down in secret the hut of my enemy, Pedro Gomez."

"I can't do that," Tony hesitated. "God will never forgive me."

"I am here. God is far away," Alfredo's father was insistent.

"It is my forgiveness that you require. Do as I tell you."

Tony caught himself in a web of quandary. That incident with the man who posed as a leper, but who was not, came back vividly to him. He was challenged and he had accepted—and the Protector-Comforter had definitely not approved.

He turned around slowly, his eyes larger as they were larged from the time he first saw the light of day, until he squarely faced the devil of a man who had bidden him to burn down his enemy's house. He stared fiercely at the ragged shirt front of the old peasant of the mountains. What was the word for peasant in Tony's native tongue?

Never mind, Tony transfixed in his glare the identity of Alfredo's father. And he concentrated his mind power through his eyes glued upon that ragged shirt front.

"It's beginning to smoke!" shouted Alfredo from somewhere.

"It bust into flame! You are burning me!" yelled the old man, this time with a frightened look in his aging eyes. "Turn your eyes away from me . . . you . . . you . . ."

Tony, appearing to be in some kind of a trance, turned and walked slowly away. Halfway towards where Alfredo's house once stood, he looked around, found the ball picked it up and carried it away with him. It must not be used for what it was intended—a play thing—never again. It represented some inner ball of fire which permeated fiber in the physical body of Tony Agpaoa.

For what use is this power he so clearly possessed?

Tony Agpaoa, when not in the midst of ministry of healing, was always alone, as he had always been alone since childhood even when among his people, except for the Protector-Comforter. None, save Tony knew of his existence—unless Tony told but which he never did—so that those who saw him, saw him as being alone. And so much of the time in his aloneness, he saw himself.

He sought to analyze his aloneness. Why it must be, he asked himself, everybody seemed to be alone. People were born alone. And each died alone. One's aloneness, however, was the most fearful, especially if one did not know that there might be other Protector-Comforters—one for each and each for one.

Alfredo, the boy whose suggestion born out of exasperation in their inability to reach for the ball, had shown Tony his flame-power, had been so close to him more than anyone. But had either of them been anyone else, they might not have been—a rather ridiculous statement that, nevertheless, had a semblance of validity of its own.

They were as close together as could be, in ball games especially, because they could run as fast, as far a distance, and as wildly each as the other. But after the fire, which to Tony was spelled with a capital "F", Alfredo watched Tony as if they were total strangers to one another. And what is worse, to Alfredo, Antonio was stranger than anybody else he ever met—as if Tony

was completely alien, a sort of strange being encased in a Filipino skin. Tony grasped this at once after the burning of Alfredo's house, and watched the latter slowly moving away from him—as if, while standing still, the place where Alfredo was standing kept receding away creating an unbridgeable chasm between them. Alfredo was still there. They still played together in games. But Tony felt that his playmate and friend had gone forever never to return as the Alfredo he had known before the Fire. His aloneness he felt the more deeply.

There was this girl, some years older than Tony: Marcela Fuegos—aptly named—from whom Tony learned about human temptations that were not to stand him in good stead. For his compelling urge to yield to temptation was a drive to dangerous adventure. He studied the girl at a distance . . . later at a much closer range. For the girl made herself, as often as possible, available for study—and temptation. Tony's good mind, and certainly his wisdom and association with the Protector-Comforter, should have made him immuned. But his resistance seemed to be weakening.

He studied and considered temptations from every possible implications, even complications, from the viewpoint of his people's mores as these were handed down from generation to generation. As for Marcela, others studied her, too, but she was indifferent to all of them, or seemed to be so. When Tony was around, she had no eyes for others. Yet, the very fact of her presence left Tony alone, evermore.

As he grew in years, there were other Marcelas with as many different names. There was Mercedes, Daniela, Faria, Antonia, Petra, Voce, "Habla," Suena Bellalita . . . the list, true name, nicknames, diminutives, grew longer. But the longer the list of names became, the more alone Tony felt himself to be. If he favored Marcela who most compelled favor, the others sought to draw him away. Marcela's building fury drove him away from her, only to be drawn back to her closer than before.

"They would have torn to shreds what few clothes I wore," Tony reminisce in later years, "if I had not been able to run faster than most of them."

There were some who could run as fast, outdistancing their other romantic sisters, and the race became a matter of endurance —sometimes influenced by Tony's desire to be caught, lest he

outrun them all and be truly alone. If this had happened, he knew he would slow down, or even backtrack, to stave the emptiness of being physically alone. But when he did, the other girls would be able to catch up, and the time come for him to run again. There was little fun in this kind of "chase". It was too seriously intended. Girls had wily ways of capture, and Tony was believed to be a "big catch" even long before anything could really be expected of his capture.

'I could have been held a captive at a much earlier age," Tony mused much later. "But what could be more lonely than being a captive?"

There were many in Tony's own clan who did not believe in his legendary powers, yet they would have capitalized in these powers because strangers from far away places did believe in them.

But to Tony, to be exploited was to be lonely—the loneliest of the lonely. And he saw to it that no man—relative, stranger, friend, or foe—would exploit his God-given powers.

Yet his own people intrigued him. What did they believe in him? Ones own seldom believe as strangers might believe. The man Jesus had stated something to that effect a long time ago: "The birds of the air have nests, the fox have holes, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."

One had to be alone, if one were Tony Agpaoa. Nor might anyone else, uninvited, know where to lay his head each night.

It could not be the same place two nights in succession. This was to be so very early in what he came to call his ministry, for one must move, and move again, from one area of loneliness to another.

Whenever Tony went home from many strange places he could seldom name or say definitely in what directions they were, his own people told him of the many gossips about him being bruited about in his absence and he listened and little of such gossips seemed to have happened to him actually, or else these had all transpired so quickly, in so fast a sequence, that he could not remember the details. Yet he really add a good memory.

So he came to hear about himself, and came to regard that self whose exploits he seemed not to remember as a stranger and

alien from a place he considered home but which he no longer felt.

He would sleep in any tree where he could perch comfortably, but never in any "caimito" tree, lest he awaken to find himself atop the same tree where the profound trauma of his loneliness began.

Nobody was exactly of Tony's age. This again is cause for loneliness. The children of his own age were children because, unlike him, they have not awakened to power, force, and inner discipline. Boys of his own age were boys. Yet he came to feel that he has no boyhood, though he played games with all who played games, and was pleased. But it was a lonely sort of pleasure, for sometimes loneliness is pleasure in itself. No healer was capable of healing loneliness. Tony, possibly, could heal it in others by talking them out of it, but where others listened and were pleased, he was imperceptively widening his own horizon of solitude.

"Are you also alone, Sir?" he asked his Protector-Comforter one day, almost afraid to have an answer.

"Nothing is more lonely than a spirit," came the reply. "The only difference is that a spirit is wholly capable of dealing with solitude. It knows nothing else for it hasn't, save in its own magnetic field, a mind and a body to keep it company."

"Is that why God made man his own image, that God might have companionship?"

"A profound question, Antonio," said the Protector-Comforter, "and the answer seems to be yes. But as God has not been seen by man at any time, so even spirits which issue forth from God have not seen Him in the sense understood by man."

"Then greater loneliness may be expected Beyond the Door?"

"Yes, and prepare for it, Antonio. Sit, meditate ponder, pray, and allow your inner questions to be answered by your 'inner man.' Only then will you come to know what is meant to be truly alone. When you realize, you will know it to be the closest aloneness there is. A companionable aloneness because there are no companions, but only in the sense of awareness that in the infinite vastness of the universe there are other words . . . other people . . ."

WELCOME DELEGATES to the
SPIRITUAL CONVENTION (1972)
JUNE 15-25, 1972
BAGUIO CITY, PHILIPPINES

"By myself?"

"No. Each man is his own universe—alone. You are not alone in your aloneness."

"The best way is to live loneliness then?"

"To be whole in yourself, as nearly as it appears possible, reach and continue reaching for that potential in yourself as every man should."

"Heal oneself wholly, and one is not lonely?"

"Something of that sort, Antonio. Heal others, or assist them to heal themselves, and those whom you have healed or assisted to heal themselves, become your invisible companions."

"Like yourself?"

"You can start with me," Tony sensed chuckle in the voice that wasn't a voice. And he felt lonelier than ever.

"To be less lonely," Tony suggested, "I should perhaps disregard myself?"

"Yes, to be selfless is the highest stage a mortal can ever hope to be. But see to it that your temple, your body is firmer, stronger, day by day. Let nobody like the Marcelas of your world tear it apart brick by brick—fiber by fiber. One's strength in body and soul is the best guard against loneliness . . ."

"And against the Marcelas of my own world?"

"Not against anyone. Not even against the Marcelas in your own world. Just watch. Move with your own people in most that they do, but be on guard."

The voice that wasn't faded out, or, possibly, he must have stopped listening and sought to digest what he had sensed. He came to a conclusion: To engage himself so utterly busy that he would have no time to think of himself; to sleep as long and soundly each night as those who seek him would allow; to set himself in a trance-like state when he treated others of their ailments, insisting so deeply on the state that he would forget self and feel closer to his Protector-Comforter. For it was as such time when a hiatus impended that he could 'see' him. But, as an after thought, he mused: Isn't "seeing" him who has no "appearance" another form of loneliness?

"Learn to live with it, Antonio," came the voice again. "As all of us must."

"All of us?"

"All men, yes. God must have been fearfully lonely when He created man to be His companion, so much so that much of that loneliness has descended into every human being who takes time to consider self over and above his fellow human beings."

"If I could heal man of his loneliness . . ." Tony suggested. The idea came so quickly, and he thought it would . . . he felt it to be wild.

"It might be healing a sickness that God did not really intend to visit upon man . . . the trauma of solitude which God had forever before He created man. Even to think of eternal life, or eternal death . . ." the voice hesitated.

"The latter is endurable, at least, because it is unsensed," suggested Antonio.

"You are suggesting a difference between the two," said his Protector-Comforter. "But is there really a difference?"

"Well, many are those who believe in eternal life after death," countered Tony.

"And you?"

"I know not what it is. I only know that, if it is not false, it is true."

"But that does not explain what is truth about loneliness of which you have been so concerned most," admonished the voice. "Do not deviate from that which you seek. To know the truth, remember, will make you free."

"But it seems there is no way to find out."

"Together, perhaps, we may find out. Shall we try?

"I think I must have promised that in my early years of reason."

"You remembered correctly. But you may be released from your promise by the simple act of not keeping it," the voice assured him.

"Then let us be lonely until we know its reasons, or why the Father, in His infinite wisdom, caused it to surface among men."

"No, He did not. It was there. It has always been there. Man is always in the process of absorbing it."

"It's an imbalance then?" Tony asked his Protector-Comforter.

"Yes. And who so balances it will know the truth, by which he will be free."

"And probably just as lonely as ever?"

"Only until such time as one learns of the ultimate in truth, Antonio."

Tony was a living, walking, barrage of questions asked of himself. He knew that few could answer them for him. Possibly, he couldn't even ask them properly. Simply, yes—properly, he couldn't be sure.

What is there before the eyes that the eyes couldn't see?

There was that tree, a large one, a giant among childtrees in the fastness of the Caraballo mountains where he spent so much of his innocent years. It was big enough that an unguessable number of somethings could be hidden behind it. There has to be something behind that which cuts off the sigh from reaching infinity, else why should it occur to him that there might be? What is beyond that blue mantle up in the sky? That ultimate distance where the eye could see? If only in his imagination, there had to be something where one sees nothing. But imagination built things. If within you, you saw something, it had to be. That is if one does not fear what one cannot see but which is there, nevertheless.

"True, Antonio," said the Protector-Comforter. "There are a myriad of things that could exist . . . in the mind. These could be real . . . real as fear could be. You have experienced that when you fear something, that something becomes real in that pursues you, races to confront you wherever you are. There is nothing more deadly than fear."

"True, fear is real. And I say lightning is real. Should I not fear standing beside a tree when the lightning strikes?"

"The chances are against it, Antonio,"

"There is such a thing as chance, then?" Tony, like all his people, believed in chance in that they gambled with cards, dice or fighting cocks.

"There is neither chance nor accident, Antonio," the voice seem serious. "Whatever has been, is now, and will be."

Going back to the lightning, Tony asked: "When the thunder rolls and lightning strikes, is there really a sound—if there is no one there to listen?"

"I have never been there to listen," said the Protector-Comforter gravely, "when there was no one there to listen."

One other question that intrigued Tony no end was: What was there within hearing that one could not hear?

He could hear his Protector-Comforter, to begin with. He couldn't hear many sounds that animals could hear, but he could hear the whispers in his heart, in his mind. He could imagine hearing voices of people afar, and he could imagine others hearing his voice. Is there such a kind of hearing? Did everybody have it . . . including animals?

He tried an experiment. He thought of Suano, the spotted mongrel which was never away from Alfredo, his ersthwhile friend and playmate, even when Alfredo slept. Suano was miles away.

"Come, Suano," whispered Antonio within himself. "Come to me."

"You come to me," he fancied he heard Suano say.

"No! I called you first. No dog commands me."

That ended his experiment, except that within minutes a happy barking turned him in the direction of Alfredo's house. He hadn't been sure of the direction when he "called" Suano, but there came the dog, panting from running, tongue hanging out, pleasure in every bid of his wagging tail. But what did it prove? That Suano heard? That Tony, likewise, heard?

"How is Alfredo?" Tony asked Suano aloud.

Whence came the answer? Form, or through, his Protector-Comforter? Or from deep somewhere within Suano? But he seemed to have heard the answer: "His foot has been cut and bleeds much!"

Antonio hadn't expected such an answer, even in his imagination. Had there been actually such an answer when he asked Suano the question? Suano had turned around, heading home, whining for Antonio to follow him. Tony followed, careful not to be held back by the unseen somethings behind the trees he passed —which unseen somethings probably circled around each tree as he passed to cheat his seeing. Then he broke into a run.

"I sent Suano for you, Antonio," said Alfredo, his face wan and twisted in pain, as he sought to stop the flow of blood from his foot with both grasping hands. "I didn't know whether you would get my message or not."

Antonio looked at Alfredo incredulously, then proceeded to stem the flow of blood quickly and easily, the while talking and murmuring to himself: "Did Suano, the dog, speak for my ears? Did Alfredo whisper across the miles, through the vastness of the forest, so that I heard him? Is there a bit of madness in the whole thing?"

How could one be sure? But Alfredo's foot was, in fact, bleeding when Tony arrived.

This bit of "sending" and "receiving" of "messages" across vast distances seemed hopelessly intriguing. Tony took time to study more of the phenomena and discovered that, sometimes when alone to himself physically and engrossed in his own thoughts, he could hear his mother calling, his brothers quarelling, his father being . . . well, his father. Sometimes this hearing was hazy and hardly audible, to his inner self mainly, that he had to hurry home to know what the telephatic message was all about, thinking up some plausible reasons as he walked, ran all but flew. There didn't seem to be anything when he got there, save a feigned surprise that he had to hurry home, but sooner or later, the family would tell about it all.

But until he knew the reason of his new-found power, he had to be careful—after the first time when he wasn't—and never to nod wisely and say: "I know, I heard it all which is why I came." In that first experience, nobody believed him, or if some believed, they so exaggerated the tale to others that he had to flee from it sometime so soon after coming home that there was no time to eat.

"Keep your own counsel, Antonio," said the Protector-Comforter.

He was not sure what the inner voice told him. His mother put it simply: "Don't talk, except to me, of course," He talked about it to her, but his mother talked of it to others, more than he would have talked as freely as he should have. He learned to be discreet after that, even to his own mother.

What could one smell which is not there and wafted no scent? This he could, and in his own method, tested. The sweet smell of Marcela, for instance. He remembered it would have been unpleasant had she not used cheap perfume. But when he thought of it, her true scent came to him and the perfume became unpleasant. Often, by "smelling," he could conjure up Marcela. And often as he thought of her, he would drop the avenue quickly lest she also "conjured up" and come to him unbidden through the trees.

It was thus he became aware that Marcela was ill, in her heart or head. With him, she saw none other, spoke of none other, seemed aware of none other. Was he jealous when he discovered, by his newly-discovered telepathic power—it was in fact a telepathic power—extending farther than it was physically possible, that Marcela had many "friends" when he was away? Fanciful thoughts, of course, something told him—his vanity perhaps. He couldn't believe that Marcela flirted with many "friends" in his absence. Is it not that when he saw her again, he seemed the only one around? But his mother made it clear to him: she flirted outrageously with other men of all ages.

Is this sickness, too? Instantly, his compassion was aroused. When he saw her again he tried, somehow, to suggest an inner healing. It may or it may not have worked, for he seldom remained near her to assess the results after that.

There were many flowers in the jungles. By then he knew the names and inhaled the fragrance of all. He thought of a particular flower—though deeply of its name. Instantly, it was invisibly there with him, and he saw it clearly in all the places he remembered to have seen it. He intensified his thought, "smelling" each flower, and he "saw" it all around him, where he sat—thinking and "smelling".

He tried one area which somehow didn't work. He "smelled" all the wonderful food he had tasted in many wanderings, distinctly "saw" each near him, like a mirage in the desert which seems

real under the blinding desert sun. But when he reached out his and took some of the food, carefully choosing, and "ate" with relish as he could image forth from within himself, the "taste" was somehow lacking because, actually, the food wasn't there.

But wasn't it?

If he had not, in fact, "eaten", what happened to his hunger? To his thirst when he had, imaginatively, washed down the food with draughts of clear cold water from a pool he well remembered from a time gone by?

Area of puzzlement!

Anybody knows that hunger can never be satiated with vain imaginations of food and drink. And yet? He remained for sometime without a pang of hunger and thirst though he, actually had eaten nothing, drunk nothing. Is he that strange, perhaps? But he knew that already. All that one could smell and eat, one could taste. All that one tasted, he had eaten and smelled. But in this particular area that puzzled him, the sense taste is, definitely, not allied to the two. He banished the thought.

There were other senses, of course, one which he would devote vastly more time to it because it was the basis of his healing ministry: the wisdom and power in his sense of touch. It ran through all the chapters of his daily life.

And there was another "sense", and extra one, he felt sure, not covered by, perhaps not related to, any of the others.

The "sixth sense".

The "third eye".

The "Solar Plexus Vision".

The three refers to the same. He pondered on this "sixth sense", feeling that, certainly, it must be the key to open more vistas than man had, down all the ages, ever suspected.

People, Tony knew, exalted themselves by how much they could see with an "eye" that wasn't—a "third eye". When he was a little boy, Tony frequently examined his naked self, trying to find the so-called "third eye". But each time, he concluded his physical examination more convinced that, like everybody else, he had only two eyes.

"I could see men as trees walking," said an erthwhile blind man to the Master who gave him back his vision. Is the so-called "third eye" something like that? His mother could "see", though sometimes not so clearly, with a "third eye" anybody could very well see what she didn't have. It must be somewhere, with which she could see, itself being unseen.

"Gilda is coming. She is on her way and will be here soon," someone could really "see" without looking, would say. As soon thereafter, as Gilda's coming was said in his presence, Tony could see Gilda, bare legs and feet making a cloud of dust on the trail, as she hurried towards them. But that wasn't actually seeing. It was just a kind of knowing that Gilda was enroute.

The idea of a "third eye" fascinated Tony so much. In time, he learned that what was odd about this supposed "third eye" is that one could see best with it when the other two eyes are closed.

"Or when you are asleep," the Protector-Comforter broke in one day. "The closest to virtual stillness, the clearer is the vision of the eye that isn't."

"Then if I were dead," retorted Tony, "my third eye vision would be clearest."

"Yes, but don't approach too near death just to make your third eye vision keener!"

Tony had long since noticed that when he had worked himself to unendurable fatigue—yet endure he must—there was something vastly keener in his technique, if it could be called that, of healing. If he were an spirit, would his power of healing be perfected? There were many healers who called upon the spirits of people long dead. These healers seemed to have that feeling of oneness with those already in the life hereafter. And in the process of their healing, when calling upon certain spirits, they, in some way, make one feel that death is a fate inevitable which should not be dreaded. If these healers could call upon the spirits of the dead, then why not call anyone back from dying? He knew perfectly well that he had saved many from possible death. He couldn't be sure, of course, that one he did not treat would die. But the converse is not true, at least in the majority of patients he had treated. He knew from experience and observation that many of the illness he had treated would have caused death in the long run. In some cases, of course, the probabilities of "If" makes uncertain whether or not the illness would have resulted in death.

Not everybody could come to Antonio wherever he happened to be, though many sought him out. As the tales of his healing power spread far and wide, so has the healing places grown in number throughout the lowlands—among the Ilocanos, Pangasinenses, Tarlaquenos, Pampangos, Tagalogs, among the mountain people of the North. To these healing places would go the sick, the moaning, the feverish, the paralytics, the phlegmatics, people with known or unknown ailments, even those with imagined illness, to await Tony's coming.

How did he knew where to go first, the next, and the next? He would think about these healing places, weighing the totality of the demands one healing place had against the others on the bases of the gravity of the ailments and the urgency of healing. One person near death, or filled with pain beyond endurance, could tip the balance of the scales.

He would think of going to a healing place where there were only scores of people awaiting, or to a place where hundreds awaits him, where he believes his healing power is most needed. And, with the back of his hand to his brow to wipe off the sweat of fatigue, or maybe as a gesture of concentration, Tony would cast his eyes about him, then set off. At times, he couldn't put one foot ahead of the other. Then the "call" would come silently strident as if one healing place had said: "Here is the most important healing to where you must come, and you would best hurry . . . hurry . . . hurry . . .!", and he would start walking briskly . . . almost in a run.

Tony ran awkwardly. He was never what the athletic world called, of which he had never heard, an athlete. Yet there were days on end when a marathon runner would have had difficulty keeping abreast with him. Arriving, he would work at healings and "operations", sigh with relief after a work satisfactorily completed, and probably on time, only to take up running the trails again as if with vigor renewed by the very fact of healing success.

Has he a "third eye"? And was his "third eye" seeing? Tony knew he had, and that he could "see" with it. It stirred his vivid imagination. If it ever had played him false, he would have, thereafter, avoided the use of it. There were instances when two messengers, or three, or more, would come within minutes of each other panting before him, each with a message. Some of their messages would be exaggerated, some would be understated, others untrue. Tony, if he heeded exactly what these messengers told him, would be going to the least urgent places most of the time, making unprofitable runs.

But he could "see" . . . with his "third eye" . . . with his ears as it were, when he listened to each of the messengers.

"She will die in childbirth if you are not there to help her within an hour."

This man would bleed to death . . . if . . ."

"A woman would need immediate "operation" to remove a growing mass in her breast."

"A mistaken judgment, or if his "third eye" played him false, would spell the difference between life or death.

"She has just happily delivered," someone inside told him. Then he would tell the messenger who would look at him wide-eyed, his mouth gaping. He could never be wrong, else faith in him would vanish. It was and important that this should never be, for healing was and is reason for being the Antonio of the "caimito" tree to Antonio, "The Living Legend".

The growing fame of Tony gave him more and more healing work to do so that, it became physically impossible for him to satisfy the needs of the ailing legions among his people, he had promising others help him. Men and women, some old enough to be his parents, some not so old, others as old or as young as he was, who, somehow, could take some of the burden from his shoulders. But never were there enough who would dedicate themselves as Tony had dedicated himself.

Even in "recruiting" other to aid him in his increasingly formidable task, Tony's vision helped him. He would look into the face and read thereon the eagerness and sincerity of the would-be healer. Then Tony would look farther into the heart of the eager one where there seem to be a kind of by-way into that one's future and destiny. He would examine that by-way in his own mysterious way, shake his head, and cause the would-be healer much pain: "You wouldn't last three of four healings. After that, you would give up your ministry for a moment's rest. That must never be while there are healings to be done," he would say firmly but not unkindly, indeed with a deep inner sadness, "for the healer, there is time to rest only when all the healings required have been done, after which you are enroute to the next."

"Does not one ever sit, or eat, or sleep, or even make love?" would be the next question, differently worded.

"Only if everything else had been done."

"I affirm by the Master that I will faithfully make use of whatever gift of healing I may have," the would-be healer would say.

Tony learned soon enough that when he had shaken his head, he should never change his mind and nod. If he allowed himself to be persuaded, too much time was wasted, more sadness caused. When once he judged, he maintained his judgment.

There were some of those who were rejected by Tony who went on healing on their own accounts and, themselves, became famous. For their individual successes, Antonio was glad for them and their patients. If, occasionally, they went away, he was sad, indeed. Those who became largely successful looked to Antonio and spoke of him to their patients and who would listen avidly.

Time marched on. Personality, Tony noticed, was interfering in his work, which interference Tony refused to see as a legitimate influence. He submerged his own, true, though he never became impersonal for a true healer could be impersonal. He knew, two, that the best impersonal healer had to be a machine of some kind, trained within itself in sympathy and understanding. Antonio doubted such a machine would ever come from anywhere.

Tony was a dedicated man but short of being a machine, impersonal, unfeeling.

When Tony became aware that he had not visited his home for years on end, it came to him that there was one woman in his home whom he missed beyond believing, his mother. They were close without making a great point of their closeness to one another, as women among Tony's own people were close to their sons. To her mother, her closeness to her strange son who was, somehow, touched by the Hands of God was something especial.

When Tony became acutely aware of the widening gap of passing years that separated him from his mother, his Protector-Comforter impressed upon him: "When you need her, I will cause her to sleep. Her spirit will then be with you as other spirits are, only closer. When she sleeps as you sleep, she will be with you."

"But in this, isn't there a puzzling element of time?" Tony asked. "If my mother had to sleep to be with me in spirit, how would she know when to visit me when sometimes, I am busy for three full days without sleep at all?'

Sleep is of many forms, Antonio," he heard the voice again. "When you are busy and so absorbed in your work that you forget yourself, it is as if you are asleep although, of course, you are always aware of what you do to secure the safety of your patient of the moment, or all of then."

Tony remembered some people say it is as if he was in a "trance" when he was busy in his healing ministry.

He was soon to prove the voice right . . .

"Mother!" he whispered inside him, knowing, somehow, that she was there.

"She does not, however, know that she is with you," the ever present Protector-Comforter told him. In her heart, yes, where you will always abide as you did before you were born, she is naturally with you. But in her mind she does not know it, and she grieves because you have been away for these many years."

You gave up your home to heal." there was grim finality in the inner voice. "Your home is where you are doing your best to save lives."

The fearful things that Tony was doing to save lives!

He had never heard of Caesar, but sure of what he was doing a'nd without the slightest hesitation, he performed his first Caesarian "operation" because he "saw" what must be done to save the lives of the mother and her child. His fame for this fanned abroad, and there were many who asked him to perform a Caesarian section, which requests he refused for one reason or another. To him, the pain of birth is purifying. He would never perform this "operation" unless it spells the big difference between the life and death of both the mother and her chlid. But even in this, he would never agree to the operation unless the fetus is already endowed with certainty of survival. If, otherwise, he did, he felt, he would be using his hands for Satan's purposes.

There were always many factors to consider for or against. Conceivably, it might be right to free a woman from the cause of shame and family dishonor. In making a judgment here, Tony's "thir eye" had to be considere in tipping the balance in favor of what is right. If ever called upon to decide against all the dictates of customs, his people's mores, the church, social propriety, would he decide in favor of sending back the unborn child to wherever it came from?

"I pray, Sir," he said, "that I will never be called upon to make such a decision."

The Protector-Comforter did not answer. Tony had answered for himself, but, as before, he had reservations. These were constantly in his mind, for virtually everything that influenced the lives of people to their imbalance were brought to him for judgment.

"I would lose my healing power if I ever misuse it," his heart and soul told him.

Would there ever be time when he would feel it proper to jeopardize his mission on earth and do an act which God's people insisted was morally wrong?

In his future, as he had known it before it came, there was such a call to violate one of God's Commandments. If only he could head it off! But when he sought it in his future again on purpose, he could not find it.

Of what value now is his "third eye" vision to him? Was the catastrophe inevitable? Must it transpire inspite of his gifts . . . of his mission?

When his mind kept returning to it, he felt his mother's presence, though he knew it had nothing to do with her welfare, health, or inner well being.

Then, as it happened before, a shadow from his future moved through the jungles of his healing places.

Antonio Agpaoa the man rounded out, rather than grew upward, a kind of roly poly man-boy, whose fame had become greater than he ever hoped or imagined, "third eye" or no "third eye".

He had been in countless homes where happiness reigned supreme, where husband and wife lived in and for each other, for better or for worse. Tony had learned all the facts of life and felt that they must be beautiful. But he did not know until he was around seventeen years of age.

Years have passed swiftly unnoticed. He had been too busy living them for legions of other people. Young girls had began to whisper to him of what making love might mean, if only one bothered to learn. When this came, Tony

listened for advice from his Protector-Comforter, but it never came. He knew then that this is a matter which he must decide for himself.

He didn't think of love in terms of a wife. What would he need one for, always on the roads and trails, lowlands and highlands, as he was? How could a wife ever bear following him? There were some girls who insisted that to follow him would be their greatest joy. But he couldn't see the joy in them when he looked to the endless tomorrows filled with the sick.

He love to have children of his own. There would be sons and daughters, possibly many of them. He knew many homes filled with the joyous laughters of many children. If he were a father, even once, how could he possibly travel from the sick to the sick with his child in a far away place where he couldn't even look into his innocent eyes and listen to his gleeful laughter?

He could always "look" by closing his two eyes. But he'd be afraid to, he thought, knowing people as he did. Suppose he had a wife whom he loved so deeply, one whom he loved even before marriage else he would never have married her, and when he looked with his "third eye", the arms of some other man encircled her. He knew this did happen to people he knew. Both sides of the arrangement "argued" with him. And often it is the third party in the triangle, though for long he did not know what a triangle is. The husband, the wife, the other man. Or the wife, the husband, the other woman.

Yes, if living showed to him that his wife wasn't all his hopes, his aspirations, he could so easily find interest in another woman, someone like Marcela. And this would hurt him deeply, possibly ruin his home.

He was having second thought . . . about marriage. Yet, when the virtually dying person under his hands was a girl as lovely as the one he had in mind, he would say to himself: "This girl could be the one. How do I feel? How would I feel it, after she became my wife, she would be as she is now, under my hands? Within minutes of death?

Anyone, even the deeply loved, is fated to die. Worse, that one could continue to live, sick, sad, complaining, hurting. He wouldn't like that either. Time after time, he looked up from his

healing into the face of a husband whose wife was under his hands. He had seen such dumb misery there.

"Antonio, she must not die. You must save her. If she dies, I am a dead man, too, and all our lovely children with us!"

How many times, while treating a girl patient, had he talked with himself . . .

"What a lovely wife this one will make!"

"This could be the promised one."

"This one is older, but I will grow older. Whoever I will marry will grow older."

"Will she be like . . . ?"

In his mind, he would substitute himself for every married man . . . substitute the woman of his dreams for every female under his hands. The female children would either be his children, or grow into women befitting his dream wife. This drove him more and more. It drove him away from marriage rather than into it. Even if he were wealthy, he would never turn away from his healing ministry. It was a call which he must heed. So how could a wife, a family, ever possibly fit in his life? The question kept posing itself as time dragged on. So he hunted, whether he elected or not.

He knew every detail of love life . . . in an impersonal sort of way. He know the woman's side. The man's. The pair. The product. He knew what harsh labor was. He knew when women made it harsh—to stir the sympathy of husbands and lovers. He knows the wily ways of some women who lure other men into other love nests. And what women can do, knowingly or unknowingly, to drive their husbands into the arms of other women.

How could one who know so much, experience so much, yet desires the love of a woman, whatever the consequences might be? Yet there it was . . . the desire. While he did not enter into a sort of love arrangement, tempted though he so often was, the very fact of his desire heightened the strange music of his healing. His healing body, his mind, his soul, were manifested through his hands with greater fervor. He felt so exalted inwardly with every healing success that he could read his exaltation in his

own face when facing a mirror. He is humble in the face of success. Yet when he heard others talking of his successes in healing he cannot help but feel elated, for after all, he is as human as any other man.

Healing did something to Antonio himself. Whatever that was, it became less and less indefinable as the years passed swiftly by. Sometimes this would happen: While he worked desperately to save a life, or to ease an excruciating pain, or help a mother deliver, others awaiting his ministrations were free to watch, free to pray with those who prayed for the sick. Some who waited and watched and prayed found that just by watching, inwardly going through the same experience as Tony and his patients were going through, discovered themselves to have been healed without the actual touch of the healer's hands. Tony became increasingly aware that his ability to heal did not necessarily abide his hands, or even in his body. He could have managed by prayer and right desire in its deepest form, but most patients needed the comforting touch of his hands, even when the touch seemed to rip an abdomen asunder.

A beautiful girl would lie under his hands, adoring him as her deliverer from pain or certain death. Many women of varying ages, while in the throes of being healed, would cry out: "You're wonderful! I love you! I love you! Your gentle touch is my deliverance!"

They would call thus, though he had not actually touched them yet, and they were healed. But if he told them that they were healed without his touch, certain relapse would follow. So he touched them, and an abdomen opened, blood flowing. He could have made the opening without a drop of blood as he ealier discovered, but the people would not believe in bloodless surgery. They had to believe. They had to feel . So he allowed the blood to flow.

The blood flowing did not help him any in his inborn desire for female companionship, when thouhts of love and marriage went right along with his endless treatments. He would look at and admire a lovely, shapely, cream-skinned female body. In the next instant it would be messy with blood. If one still saw the image of a wife in the person under ones hands, how could that one love her pooled in blood?

And how about children who were born to die before they had lived! No family is a family without children. How could a conscientious man bring forth babies into the world, knowing they could be doomed to die without seeing the light?

"I am a healer," he would console himself fiercely, sometimes aloud while his attention was riveted on a woman whose baby had to be taken out by Caesarian section. "I can keep my own alive, even as I have snatched so many from the clutches of certain death."

So how could he know, if mother and children were always with him in his ardous travels. Families did travel, he knew, seeking work, seeking new barrios, seeking . . . seeking other places—small migrations which seemed to drive men of family, women of family, large family, small family, men alone, women alone, children in group, children alone, to go from one place to another. Always they traveled, ever in quest for that something that drove them to travel in he first place. He could never travel so. From one point to the other. He must always be in two places at once. And often, he is neither here nor there.

No place for a wife . . . no place for a mistress, either of which there were a number of desirables or undesirables—women from families different from his own, women who would never thought of marriage but would consent to an arrangement, women no man would ask for, lost women seeking to find themselves within his magnetic circle, girl-women who were children compared to Tony even at eighteen, women old enough to be grandmothers who yet wheedled him by promising youth for a few short years, or even months.

In this situation which constantly changed yet remained the same, he worked harder and harder, progressively longer each day, as if to prove to himself that he had no time for marriage, although the thought constantly nagged him as time shortened. He was the Tireless One.

"Tireless enough," whispered Marcela from the past, "that there remains yet enough energy for all the love-making I would require of you."

Temptress Marcela didn't speak for all. But the words of one temptress varied from that of the other though the words were

skin. Most spoke for themselves, very frequently while the sick world around him listened, nodded, approved, sympathized.

"Heal me," a strikingly beautiful woman said, "and I am yours".

He turned to the harrassed husband, to find the husband nodding with the rest. He abroitly avoided pursuing the subject further.

He never, to this day, learned not to blush. It did no good to say that the healing magnetism that permeated his body caused the blushing. Keen observers of human nature know this.

"It would not change," said the Protector-Comforter, "if you were married with half a dozen or more children, with wife and children watching every healing, listening to every word. Simple expressions of love are not truly simple, nor simply true. Love is good, of course. The deepest of love can involve you until only your healing ability remains with no time to use it."

"You know my thoughts. Should I get married?"

"You will marry," the Protector-Comforter said. "So it appears at the moment, though none can see into your future, not even I. But little by little you will see it . . . and you will think your way into it. By will, you can alter it with your life even as you are living it."

"What is the truth here—for me?"

"Only you can decide what it is—for you. Besides, you are in a sense married."

"What do you mean?"

"You are married in the sense that a nun is married, Antonio."

"But nuns don't marry!"

"Yes, they do. They get married to their faith, their church. They become Brides of Christ."

"But I can never qualify as a 'bride', Sir!"

"You can, but it's somewhat complicated," Tony sensed a giggling though subdued laughter. "Give yourself time and thought. You are still young."

"Many times I feel older . . . much older than my age."

"Too old for marriage?" Even the Protector-Comforter could ject. For Tony it was no laughing matter. Whenever he thought of marriage, which was occuring with increasing frequency during most of his waking hours, the thought of the moving shadow that seemed to haunt him from somewhere in his future. What did the shadow portend. If his Protector-Comforter knew, why did he not enlighten him about it? Were Antonio and the shadow headed towards a collision that could bring damnation to either or both . . . or to Antonio alone?

Why could not Tony "see" directly into the shadow, locate it, and if it were an imbalance, which shadows seemed to be, heal it even as he had healed whatever imbalance brought to him?

"If there is a woman for me," he thought, "what devilish forces threaten her? If anything does, why couldn't I see it before the threat becomes real, and make the shadow, a shadow no more?

Many times, in as many different ways, he asked himself those questions. When the answer eventually came, he was to remember all the questions that had remained without answers. He was to feel like he was looking into the face of the Father and, like Job, to curse Him and die.

But he would neither curse nor die as the shadow moved closer.

There was a time . . . there was a date, carefully noted within himself, when the shadow became hot molten lead being poured around his heart. Still he had no details. They were, he felt long later, deliberately withheld from him. Why was he not the victim, then detoured around him?

The only answer then, or later, was still a shadow—an implacable shadow—forming itself into the shape of all the rest of his earthly life.

Then he saw The Woman. He saw her more clearly than if she were flesh and blood. She was not, but he saw. And it was a shock seeing her. He didn't realize that since he had first been cozened of women, he had picture. The Woman in his mind. She smiled and all his dreams came true in her smile. Nothing could ever be wrong with this woman. She had certainly been created

for Antonio . . . as if the Protector- Comforter had created her in the image of Antonio's thoughts. Complexion, height, weight, garb, everything about her was Tony's dream.

But where was she actually? Tony asked the Protector-Comforter and, for the second time, recieved no answer. He felt that she must be somewhere in Luzon, but, though he had heard so much about his native island, he knew so little of it himself. But how could he ask anyone about a matter so intimate? Intimacy, all at once, became a profoundly real thing. He wished to share none of The Woman with anyone. He wouldn't even share her with thoughts of the other women in his past.

Tony had no idea about the name of The Woman, but surely her first name must be Mary for Mother Mary. That seemed to be a safe assumption. Besides, it is a good name. It meant something like Sea Star. So in his mind he called her Mary and thought of her as a Star risen from the sea.

Almost at once, he realized that the shadow which projected itself from his future actually related to Maria. She had been threatened, and he knew he could do something about the shadow of Maria, in flesh and blood, were with him. But she was not, though she was fearfully real, so real it became a walking nightmare, traveling with Tony all through his healings, as part of each and everyone that came for his healing. Whenever he had closed a body he had opened to a new life, he thought: "This healing is also for you, Maria. It must disperse the shadow."

Yet he knew it didn't. He could treat and heal at a certain distance, but he seemed unable to deal with this.

He began searching for the shadow. What was its form? His questing mind searched frantically for something obviously more material than either a shadow or his mental picture of Maria. He took Maria's hands in his imaginings . . . and it was warm and safe and exactly fitting his own. He could, in some ways, embrace the image of Maria. She was just the right height for him. As he thought of her more intimately than he would have dared had she been present, he saw her as vastly different in body than any of the bodies with which he dealt day after day.

He had seen the faces of many husbands and lovers as he treated the bodies of their wives and adored mistress, and knew

now just what their hearts said through their eyes and their faces as they watched and prayed for his success in healing their other selves.

That was it! Maria whom he had never seen, and might indeed never see, was his other self. But could one love on'es other self? He was not conscious of such love.

That Antonio might never see Maria, save in mind and spirit, was unthinkable, yet he thought of it as a distinct possibility, a part of the shadow which threatened him the more.

The shadow finally faded as a shadow, and became three men. He saw the three men walking side by side along the dusty street of a town he had never seen, which he sought to identify by signs, by houses, that he may ask others to help identify the town. He identified the three men at once with Maria, and asked himself why he did so.

Were they brothers of Maria?

They bore no resemblance to her. They could not have been brothers. They were truculent men. Antonio trembled when he "saw" them. Anyone of the three could have broken Tony across his knee like a dry stick. It was a relief for him to realize that they were, as yet, unsubstantial as Maria. Yet hourly all four became more real in his mind. Somehow, if they loomed before him, and the men proved themselves real threat to Maria, he knew that he must manage, somehow, to defend his love.

Maybe it was all nothing. Maybe he conjured Maria out of moonbeams . . . of cobwebs. She couldn't be real. The three men couldn't be real. If they were not real, then why did they haunt his imagination?

"Yes, Antonio," the Protector-Comforter finally entered the picture . . . the strange picture. "Maria is real. The three men you described as truculent are real. The village is real."

"Then why don't I know the village, that may go there?" asked Antonio with tinge of insistence in his voice.

"Every incident has its moment. Nobody or nothing may push that moment forward or backward."

"Not even you?"

"Not even I, for I am like you save that I wear only my finer bodies."

"You know all the people?"

"Of course, Antonio, and what is to come has already been laid out by each of them against a certain space in time."

"But what is time? By day it seems long. By night, when I am asleep, it has no substance, except that I dream. If you were to tell me, could I not go?"

"It is not allowed that I tell you."

"By whom is it not allowed?"

"Let us simply say The Powers."

"The Powers? Do they punish anyone of us . . . all of us, even you, for some reasons we will never know? Or not allowed to know?"

"It is beyond explaining," said the Protector-Comforter.

"But you know the explanation, don't you?"

"Yes, I know, but I can tell you nothing more about it."

"You imply so much, tell so little."

"I have already told you too much. I should have said nothing at all. Still there is a bit more. When the proper moment arrives, the parents of Maria will send for you."

"Possibly all of them, including the Protector-Comforter, were built of cobwebs, the stuff of nightmares. But the Protector-Comforter had proved his existence many times. Tony could not be mistaken about that. He was a real as Tony's ability to heal. Maria must be real, too.

So were the three men . . .

Tony discussed none of these dream-people with anyone except the Protector-Comforter. Had he told about this to others, they would have thought him mad. The thought fanned his despair.

His fame as a miracle healer spans the seven seas to other lands. His work was invariably good and true. Yet in one area, he was certain, he failed. He had no way of freeing Maria of the

three man-shadows. His power of healing, definitely, didn't extend so far. Maybe his Protector-Comforter was right in that he was prevented by The Powers.

Was Maria to be punished in some way she was powerless to evade?

Tony tried another way, not to heal Maria of the shadow, but to divert the shadow. If the shadow was fixed on Maria as an incident with its own moment, had he the power or right to divert it elsewhere, to some other woman? "Nobody or nothing may push that moment forward or backward," his Protector-Comforter had said.

And what is the relevance of this shadow to Maria?

Surely, she knew none of the three men. None of the three men knew her, either. Yet behind other's sleep, or in some mysterious elsewhere, plans that portend of tragedy were in the making.

Suddenly, he saw all four of the shadows together. Then he recognized the village. How could he not have recognized it before, since it was his own village of Rosales, Pangasinan? Why had scales been fastened to his eyes?

Maria, garbed beautifully as for a religious holiday walked the street with pride, suspecting nothing, fearing nothing. She stepped aside as she met the three men . . . the three shadows, of whom she was not aware until then. They started at her, turning their heads back soon as they met and passed each other. And she noticed. Any woman Antonio knew would have been keenly aware, even someway responsive to the stares and turning of heads for a second look by the three.

The trio hesitated . . . Maria's lips moved, as in prayer. Or she might have been singing to herself? They stopped on their track . . . They turned around.

"No!" cried Tony with agony in his heart. The shadows didn't hear—they couldn't have. If they heard, in some mysterious way, they did not heed. "No! . . . "No!" . . . "No!".

The men did not hear him . . . or couldn't have heard him. He called after Maria: "Run, blessed one!" "Run!" "Run!"

She did not . . . could not . . . hear. She continued singing to herself, her lips moving with her unsuspecting heart.

"No! No!" he cried to the men who were now stalking her, like men of the mountain do when they have spotted their quarry. "Run! Run!" he cried to Maria No. They couldn't hear him.

One of the three turned into an alley, running. Tony knew then what was going to happen. The tragedy of it was that he was powerless to do anything at all. If only the Protector-Comforter would help.

"But save for the impending tragedy," said the Protector-Comforter sternly, "you will never meet Maria."

"And the three men?"

"You may meet them, too. It has not yet been decided."

"By The Powers?"

The Protector-Comforter did not answer.

The man who turned into an alley disappeared . . . appeared in another alley, caught Maria and half-carried her to the shadows. The other two followed. If Maria cried out, Tony didn't hear.

The word of the woman came to Antonio by way of his Protector-Comforter.

"She did not transmit her message as others transmit their messages, but as spirit sends," said he. "Her visible person has heard of you, which is why she sent word to you. Her spirit knows that you know what, in your spirit, you have seen."

"And the message is from Maria, the woman I saw in my vision?"

"Yes, Though no one person belongs to another—not woman to man . . . not man to woman, you must go."

"You are wrong, Sir. In this, my heart tells me that Maria must have belonged to me through the ages as she now belongs to me. When with her, we will both remember."

"True, Antonio, but lest you forget, memory includes many moments in one's life, the happy moments as well as the tragic which are always part of the living man."

"That, somewhere in time, we must have parted and to remain apart through the eons?"

"Eons! Epochs! Eras! Only mortals heeds the passing of time, Antonio."

While they talked . . . in questions . . . in answers, all through each other's inner self, Tony have been moving, gravitating, homeward, knowing what awaits him in his ancestral village. He was ready to face it, freely, without fear.

Maria, if his "third eye" had not failed him, was hideously and repeatedly abused by the three men.

"And those men," the Protector-Comforter warned, "are also children of the Father. You cannot heal Maria completely, unless you also heal her abusers. And the abused, herself, is never without fault, for even innocence can be a fault. Innocence is temptation to which the unruly yields, and upon which even the controlled, the self-controlled, nonetheless, ponder. And, further, pondering can, at times, be guilt begotten by innocence, so The Master intimated."

The dust rose to his nostrils as he speeded his naked feet towards Maria. His feet never strode fast enough, though he was never slow in the direction of healing need. As he walked, he thought: "I must heed Maria's call. That which needs me, I also need."

So he came back to the home of his ancestors. He scarcely knew it anymore. No wonder he did not recognize it in his vision of Maria. He entered Maria's house without knocking because he was expected—expected by sorrowing many.

Maria, she who awaited him, was not ill in the usual sense, for she was up on her feet, walking, mute. She heard of his coming heard him being greeted at the door, and she, in turn, greeted him.

They knew each other . . . at once. There were no reticence between them. It was just as if he only left her for a few minutes, and in his absence, some catastrophe struck without warning. His return itself was an urge to repair the catastrophe.

"I came in the spirit of healing."

"I know," Maria whispered. "I need the counsel of The Healer, that I may know what the never-to-be-healed like me should do to go on living."

"Never-to-be-healed, Maria?" There is no imbalance, ever, which cannot be balanced."

"They looked deep into each other's eyes, and he answered her silent questions, or felt that he answered them. For so long as silence reigned between them, the whispering of people around in the house, in the yard below, grew to the pitch of irritation, even anger perhaps. The people were there as sympathizers and, as such, they felt they have the right to know and to hear.

Who was it who said that the eyes are the windows of the soul? The meeting of the eyes, sometimes even the stolen glances, made it possible and quite natural for Tony to stay: "I loved you always, Maria. And I love you now—much more than ever before. I will love you incessantly even as I open my heart to you."

"Then you do not know." Her voice was sad—a sign of resignation, for she saw through his eyes that he knew, after his own fashion of knowing, but not all. So in simple but horrible words, she narrated every detail, in words that were of common usage by the people, in healing, in churches by the mouths of priests, fathers, mothers. As she pieced together every horrible detail, her words became more terrifying so that Tony thought he never again listened in peace to the mouthing of Maria's tragic moment. Yet he knew, somehow, that peace abode in Maria's frail physical presence.

"From forever," he told her when she finished her story none other would ever hear of again, "I have wish to share my life with you. Throughout the eons of times past, I have been married to you, and you, in turn, cherished me." He felt that there would be no peace without his Maria.

"I am no longer fit for marriage, as we know marriage in the commonly accepted sense. But perhaps, I am fit to become a Bride of Christ."

"Bride of Christ?" Tony repeated after her. "You want to enter a nunnery?"

"There is nothing else for me to do as I am unfit for marriage . . . to be a wife, a mother. Like a leper, I must go forth to the marriage mart crying that I am unclean. But I need not cry out so. The world, my world, knows."

"I ask you to marry me," implored Antonio, feeling that he would never find peace without Maria. "Nothing happened that can make me change my mind—not your tragic moment which you spun in so many horrible words."

"And live with you under a stigma that no power on earth can ever erase? No, Antonio."

"What happened, I will forget. I will erase it forever from the slate of my memory," Antonio insisted.

"The more to remember them, my Antonio!" sobbed Maria. "If the dirty details of my sad story transmuted into many horrible words did not matter, would you need to erase them?" "In my heart, no words, no acts, can possibly change how I feel towards you, except to love more."

"Your words are precious, Antonio—more precious as my words have been terrible to you. The words met between us and, thereby, kindled the need for another life between."

'I have forgotten them, Maria."

"Tell me truly, can you not repeat them, feel them? Will you know, in the years to come, reminisce on them and, reminiscing, add more to the constructing burden of your heart?"

There was no embrace preceding the healing he had come for—the healing of Maria . . . the healing of her abusers. The three men would have been destroyed by whatever means, legitimate or otherwise, in the hands of other healers, but Antonio heeded the counsel of his Protector-Comforter. And he knew, deep in him, that wherever Maria's abusers were, they will never find peace . . . they will forever be fleeing from the wrath of those who loved Maria. He too knew that, in time, healing will catch up with them and make them nearly whole as Maria who may, eventually, find peace.

During the healing of Maria, Antonio did what he must have done, hitherto, without thinking . . . saw and took note of the feeling of pain etched in the faces of those around, and resolved the more to correct the imbalance brought upon Maria. But Tony had his misgivings. Deep inside him he knew that, as to the pain that was not which Maria went on to suffer, only she could heal.

After his home-coming, Maria was always with him when people came for héaling. She embraced the ministry of healing and became a healer in her own right . . . a healer who would never use her gift of healing until she felt that her patients had been cleansed of imbalances akin to those of her three abusers.

"The abused is not without fault." Over and over, Antonio pondered on the unbelievable words of his Protector-Comforter. How could Maria, in any way, be at fault? Is it because she had appealed to something uncontrollable in the minds of her three abusers? How? By her beauty? Or by the simple fact that she is woman?

There had been many other women who have been subjected tosimilar abuses, but they simply shrugged off such abuses as just another unfortunate happenings, leaving in them only such scars as they cared to remember.

Maria cared to remember too much. She did not change, refused even to try. In her mind she had been scarred forever. Nothing could change that, Maria, despite her healing power, could not in her own mind, heal herself.

"It is something evil and incurrable in me," she told Tony during that first spate of terrible words descriptive of her tragedy. "Something indefinable that attracted her attackers.

And more . . . only Maria, herself, could not absolve Maria, the victim. In a small town like Rosales, little was untold among the people, but they had already absolved her from the "guilt of innocence". Tony could do the same, but did not grant Maria absolution because he felt there was nothing to forgive. Nor did the priest who was openly eager to welcome Maria as Bride of Christ.

In time, Maria became a nun. Something mortal in Tony became wholly spiritual after that . . . something that went into the convent with Maria to become, thereafter, his only contact with her.

The healing light around Antonio became brighter, secure in the belief that, in some future time and in a place yet unknown, they would meet and see each other again.

The faces of pain were to become Tony's many doors, through which, under the guidance of his Protector-Comforter, he could look into the hearts and soul of the truly sick, and those not

truly sick, treating them all with equal compassion and understanding. Those not truly sick became truly sick on account of their pretenses, so that they, too, required healing as the sickest of them all.

Tony has many ways of knowing what causes illness in others: By looking at their faces, by hearing their voices, by the contortions of their body muscles. From the faces of his patients' beloved who also felt their aches and pains, only could, likewise, determine the kind of ailments he is called upon to heal. If one comes to Tony with calm resignation and a serene face, he would look into the faces of that one's relative and would know what the calmness sought to hide.

Tony regarded all pains, complaints, moans, groans, wailings, bewailings, at face value, if such is the right term. If one said he is sick, so be it.

But where and how?

Patients are in the best position to say in what part of their physical body do they feel the pain. Here Tony took the utmost care. It is seldom that the part that aches so is, likewise its origin.

Antonio looked to origins, becoming adept in locating that part of his patient's body which the patient insisted does not pain him. This is one of the secrets of his "miracles".

"I have a terrible ache in front of my head," a patient would say to whoever would care to listen. "But did Antonio touch my head? "Only to please me if because I insisted. Then he touched my right toe, or some other parts of my body, and my aching head was instantly healed."

"My child . . . the one inside me, must be shod with horseshoes," one would say. "He is continually kicking and I am in extreme pain. This wonder healer looked at my face, the better to see the pain . . . perhaps. But did he sympathize with me? Did he rub my belly, or cares my tenderness, that I may be soothed? No! He murmurred to the baby inside me as if he was singing him to sleep, or as if he was telling him to stop his kicking. The child became quiet, so quiet that it required me some time of moaning and writing before I came to know that it hurts no more. Yet this Antonio knew, somehow, that my pain is gone, and smile his knowing at me until I realized that I have been healed."

"Pain is purifying," Tony would tell his patients. He knew this to be so from his Protector-Comforter. But whenever he tells this to the people of the barrios, hey would wail their pains louder until their lamentations lost their meanings. "Perhaps they want over-purification," Tony would explain.

"Giving birth to a baby boy on bigger than his one requires only a small part of the screaming you are doing," Antonio told a girl bearing her first-born.

The girl-mother lapsed into silence. Then . . .

"Yes, Antonio, I know."

"Knowing it, then why do you scream so fiercely?"

She screamed again, then spoke to Tony softly: "Because my husband, that pale man yonder is listening."

"Yes, he is listening. But there are other husbands, young and old, for hundreds of meters around, also listening to your screams. Need they?"

"Yes, it is very important that everybody in the neighborhood hear me scream. They ask others about it. They will come and find me . . . and my husband . . .

"So what?"

"My husband will be compelled to give me as many presents as my screaming is loud."

"Meaning . . .?"

"The louder my scream is, the more presents will my husband give."

' strange way of 'purifying' through pain," mused Antonio, "and with probably the same effect."

"Perhaps the greatest aid to knowing pain and to benefit by in purifying effect is to experience it . . . feel it . . . suffer by it . . .

When Maria became a Bride of Christ, and Tony lost her forever, he felt pain, a different kind of pain maybe, but he suffered by it. Only then did he realize the truth of what his Protector-Comforter told him: "Pain can be purifying." And in his healing ministry, he was to feel a greater pain and to experience a greater suffering by it.

Eventually, Tony Agpaoa fell in love, perhaps as intense as his love for Maria . . . fathered children of his own. But that was only after he felt "purified".

He was to become a Living Legend among the peasants in his own land. The fact of his gift of healing spread far and wide, even as far as Manila, the Visayan Islands, and Mindanao.

Then ever farther, in lands beyond his own wherein he sought, in his native innocence, to cast out the malignance of pain, that it be truly purifying.

To those lands he carried what he knew of love in that love itself is the power behind the greatest of healing. But as healers before him have been rejected, so was he rejected by the unbelievers. This grievious rejection, though it took him a long hurting time to learn the wisdom behind it, became his greatest victory over what his Protector-Comforter referred to simply as The Adversary.